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CENTRE FOR MIDDLE EASTERN
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The Coptic Community in Egypt

Spatial and Social Change

by

E.J.Chitham

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'It is not so difficult' said Nessim lightly. 'The clue is the Church militant. It is odd, isn't it, that for us there was no real war between Cross and Crescent? That was entirely a Western European creation. So indeed was the idea of the Cruel Moslem infidel.'

'Do you know what they call us - the Moslems?... I will tell you. *Gins Pharoony*. Yes, we are *genus Pharaonicus* - the true descendants of the ancients, the true marrow of Egypt. We call ourselves *Gypt* - ancient Egyptians. Yet we are Christians like you, only of the oldest and purest strain _ The Moslems knew us, they knew we were Egyptians first and Christians afterwards. *Christian Egyptians* - have you British with your romantic ideas about Moslems ever thought what the words mean? The only *Christian Orientals* fully integrated into a Moslem state?'

from the Alexandria Quartet by Lawrence Durrell.
Mountolive p. 425 and 421-2, Faber and Faber 1983.

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

CONTENTS

THE COPTS AS A MINORITY GROUP

1.1 The Copts as a Minority Group in the Arab World

1.1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the importance of the Coptic minority within a region which contains innumerable minorities, and to portray some of its character as a minority group. The region under consideration is the Arab-speaking part of the Middle East; that is to say the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt, Libya and Sudan. The Maghreb countries are excluded as being essentially North African rather than Middle Eastern, and Turkey and Iran are excluded as they are not predominantly Arab in culture. In human terms, therefore, this region is characterised by its Arab nature in both culture and language. Equally importantly, the dominant religion is Islam, with adherents to the Sunni branch being the most numerous. The only exceptions to this general pattern are Sudan (with a small majority of Black Africans but a Sunni religious majority, Arabic as a first language and a general acceptance as an 'Arab country') and Israel. Israel is the obvious exception on linguistic and religious grounds, but is equally obviously a geographical part of the region and an important political influence, and is therefore included.

1.1.2 Definition of minority

A minority may be defined as a group of people who are in some way different from and dominated by the people around them[1]. In this chapter we are only concerned with people as members of individual states; regional and sub-national minorities are beyond the scope of the study. The domination is often numerical, although a group deprived of social privileges or one which feels or is felt to be inferior may equally be defined as a minority. Usually, however, these conditions coincide with numerical domination and it is this type of minority which will be emphasised here.

The group may be differentiated (or differentiate itself) by religion, physical features, language, customs and heritage, shared experience and nationality or by a combination of these.

Most minorities in the region as defined are either non-Arab, non-Sunni or both. Of increased importance in the oil-rich states in particular are migrant workers from other states. These three groups make up the divisions of Table 1.1. Group 1, 'Ethnolinguistic' has been defined as "an ethnic or ethnocultural or racial group speaking its own language or mother tongue"[2]; this essentially means non-Arabs in the countries included. Group 2, the religious minorities, include all major differentiated religious sects, while the migrant workers make up Group 3. Two minorities fail to fit comfortably into any of these groups: nomads can be differentiated mainly by their life-style, while Palestinians are united by a shared experience and a common homeland, from which many are exiled.

1.1.3 Origins of minorities[3]

The great number of minorities listed in Table 1.1 immediately prompts the question of the reasons for this diversity. Historically at least five processes can be identified as root causes of the proliferation of minorities. First, the region has been, from earliest times, the scene of migration, conquest and trade. Successive waves of conquerors emanating from the Arabian Peninsula have moulded the region's character, but the migration of peoples from the north (e.g. Kurds, Turks), some of whom spilled over into the region, and the remnants of pre-Arab nations (e.g. Assyrians, Berbers) have produced most of the present ethno-linguistic minorities. Nomads still exist, though in declining numbers. Periods of religious and political persecution triggered the migration of refugees from surrounding countries into areas where topography afforded natural strongholds, such as Lebanon and northern Iraq. On the other hand it was commercial gain that attracted many minorities to urban districts such as Alexandria. Another voluntary form of migration which has always existed is the movement of labourers and semi-skilled workers from densely-peopled areas to the less-densely populated. For example, in the nineteenth century pearl-fishing attracted divers in the Gulf[4]. Today this movement has increased to a flood as the oil-rich countries attract workers, especially from Egypt, North Yemen and Jordan within the region, and the Indian subcontinent and South-East Asia outside it. Oil

revenues have also supported waves of secondary migration, for example to Jordan.

Secondly, the region has been the birthplace of the world's three great monotheistic religions - Judaism, Christianity and Islam - which, over time, have all splintered into many different sects. Added to these are the outside influences of Greek philosophy (especially in the form of Gnosticism), Zoroastrianism from Persia, and Hinduism, which have complicated theological ideas, encouraged heterodox variations of the three main faiths (e.g. Alawis and Druzes), and fostered composite beliefs utterly separate from other faiths (e.g. the Yazidis). With each wave of religious reform, old faiths were not eradicated, but new minorities were created, protected by the benevolent attitude of the latest religion, Islam, and formalised eventually in the millet system.

A third factor in the preservation of minority communities has been the persistence of local autonomy. Governments were unable to exert full control over easily defensible mountain areas (e.g. in Kurdistan, Lebanon and Yemen) or large expanses of desert devoid of properly maintained roads. In such areas, autonomous and semi-autonomous communities survived for centuries and, during the present century, have been included willy-nilly within larger states. Exceptions to this are the coastal areas and the river valleys where communications were easy and populations were large enough to draw the government's attention. It is notable that the Copts have survived as a minority in just such an unpromising (in terms of minority group survival as described above) if fertile area: the Nile valley.

The minorities formed by these historical factors (migration, religion and localism) were crystallised and then fossilised by the advent of Islam. Freedom of conscience was recognised in traditional Islam for the 'people of the book', the Jews and Christians, but they were never allowed full social parity with the Muslims. The 'protected people' could never by persecuted systematically in the way that Muslims persecuted animist peoples, but Christians and Jews could not take part in the community of the state or its military and religious organisation. They did, however, often make themselves indispensable in state administration and in military affairs:

Christian mercenaries from outside the state concerned were sometimes employed (the Janissaries were an exception, for, although they had Christian parents, they were brought up as Muslims). In the Ottoman Empire this situation was formalised into the 'millet system', where each religious community had a civil as well as a religious head. Each millet had administrative control over its own property and judicial control over family law and civil rights.

A further factor which encouraged the proliferation of minorities within nations was the division of territory by the colonial powers in the first half of the twentieth century. In particular, the creation of Lebanon and Iraq for colonial political ends merely created minorities within nation-states of people who, regionally, are a majority. The Muslims constituted a minority in Lebanon in the last census taken in 1932, and the Sunni Arabs still form a minority in Iraq. Furthermore, the colonial powers often sought to win minority group support and to use them in government, following a policy of, 'divide and rule'. This tended to increase tension between the minority and the majority. In Egypt, the British employed the Syrian minority in administration, in an attempt to minimise reliance on native Egyptian (even including Coptic) administrators. In Syria, the French showed special favour to the Druzes and Alawis and formed special military detachments of other minorities[5].

1.1.4 The construction of Table 1.1[6]

Table 1.1 is an attempt to quantify the minorities in the Arab countries of the Middle East, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of each country's population. Before any observations on the results can be made, a number of comments on the construction and limitations of the table must be mentioned. All the figures must be treated as estimates: some are based on census data, but others are little more than guesswork. The ethno-linguistic portion is based on percentages estimated between 1970 and 1982 and the national population totals, both given in Barrett (1982). The latter set of figures generally concur with the U.S. Bureau of Census figures for 1970 (the source used for 1980 national population totals), although it is clear that Barrett has over-estimated the population of North

Yemen and possibly some Gulf States. To retain internal consistency, however, these figures have not been tampered with.

The religious minority groups are also based on Barrett, who in this case generally gives both a population and a percentage figure. For the Christian sects, statistics for professing Christians rather than church-affiliated Christians (i.e. those who admit to being Christian in a government census rather than those whom churches claim as members) have been used, where necessary breaking down the detailed statistics given by churches pro rata to fit the number of professing Christians in each broad (Orthodox / Roman Catholic / Protestant) denominational grouping. There are two additional sources used in this part of the table. Barrett simply quotes the 1932 census figures for Lebanon, which by general consent are out of date. The percentages are therefore based on the population estimates of the different communities quoted by McDowall (1983) for 1982; naturally the total population figures are somewhat higher than they were in 1970. The figures for Shi'is are incomplete in the Gulf States. There are no reliable estimates available for these countries, partly because there are no figures for the number of Shi'is amongst migrant workers.

The migrant workers' section of the table is based solely on Birks and Sinclair (1981). These figures are projections for 1980 and must be treated with caution. Work on individual countries since they were published shows that important adjustments are necessary, especially in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States[7]. Illegal immigrants and faulty (or unpublished) census data also hamper the search for accuracy. Moreover these figures are more liable to change rapidly than those in the first two sections. The number of foreign workers, and the countries from which they are recruited, can alter over a short period of time according to the profitability of the oil industry and the policies of national governments. There is a trend at present for Gulf States to employ more Indian and East Asian workers whom they can repatriate more easily at the end of their contracts. Despite these caveats, the statistics are useful as an indication of the scale of a new major type of minority population in the Middle East. One corollory to these figures is the effect they are having (or could have) on the previous two sections. For

TABLE 1.1 MINORITY GROUPS IN ARAB MIDDLE EASTERN COUNTRIES

1. ETHNOLINGUISTIC MINORITY GROUPS

	Egypt	Libya		Israel		Occupied Territories		Jordan		Syria		Lebanon		Iraq		Sudan	
Arab	*	*		491	16.8	*		*		*		*		*		7,219	46.0
Armenian						1	0.1	2	0.1	175	2.8	6.8		19	0.2		
Assyrian						1	0.1			37	0.5	0.5		112	1.2		
Berber		112	5.8														
Tuareg		6	0.3													*	
Black African				3	0.1			20	1.2	31	0.5						
Circassian										12	0.2						
Gypsy				*						4	0.1						
Jewish								2	0.1	394	6.3	0.7	1,674		17.9		
Kurdish														112	1.2		
Persian										6	0.1			9	0.1		
Turkish								2	0.1	37	0.6			112	1.2		
Turkman																	
TOTAL (1970) POPULATION	33,329	1,938		2,921		1,181		1,637		6,247		3,575 (1982)		9,356		15,695	

TABLE 1.1 (cont)

	Saudi Arabia	North Yemen	South Yemen	Kuwait	Bahrain	Qatar	UAE	Oman
Arab	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Armenian				6 0.8				
Assyrian				2 0.2				
Berber								
Tuareg								
Black African						12 11.0		15 2.3
Circassian								
Gypsy							2 0.7	
Jewish			3 0.2					
Kurdish				76 10.0				
Persian								13 2.0
Turkish								
Turkman								
TOTAL (1970) POPULATION	7,740	5,767	1,436	760	215	110	300	657

Sources and key: see end of table

TABLE 1.1 (cont)

2. RELIGIOUS MINORITY GROUPS

	Egypt		Libya		Israel		Occupied Territories		Jordan		Syria		Lebanon		Iraq		Sudan	
All Muslims	*		*		329	11.2	*		*		*		*		*		*	
Sunni	*		*		329	11.2	*		*		*		750	21.0	3282	35.1	*	
Shi'i											106	1.7	1100	30.8	*			
Alawi									3	0.2	723	11.6						
Ahmadi					1	0.1	1	0.1										
Druze					35	1.2					185	3.0	200	5.6				
All Christians	2193	6.6	8	0.4	58	2.0	43	3.7	70	4.3	375	6.0	1524	42.7	253	2.7	895	5.7
Orthodox																		
Greek					14	0.5	22	1.9	31	1.9	121	1.9	250	7.0				
Syrian			2	0.1			1	0.1	1	0.1	49	0.8			15	0.2		
Coptic	2063	6.2					1	0.1									30	0.2
Armenian							2	0.2	1	0.2	68	1.1	175	4.9	10	0.1		
Nestorian											12	0.2			31	0.3		
Catholic																	605	3.8
Latin			4	0.2	9	0.3	12	1.0	14	0.9	8	0.1						
Greek					25	0.8	3	0.2	15	0.9	59	0.9	150	4.2				
Coptic	54	0.2																
Syrian											13	0.2			22	0.2		
Chaldean											6	0.1			168	1.8		
Armenian											13	0.2						
Maronite											13	0.2	900	25.7				
Prot/Anglican	62	0.2	1	0.2	8	0.2	3	0.3	8	0.5	13	0.2					260	1.7
Jewish							1	0.1			4	0.1						
Samaritan					10	0.3												
Yazidi											10	0.2			80	0.9		
Sabaean															18	0.2		
Hindu																		
Tribalist																	3259	20.8
Atheist	30	0.1					1	0.1							10	0.1		
TOTAL (1970) POPULATION	33,329		1,938		2,921		1,181		1,637		6,247		3,575 (1982)		9,356		15,695	

Sources and key: see end of table

TABLE 1.1 (cont)

RELIGIOUS MINORITY GROUPS (cont)

	Saudi Arabia	North Yemen	South Yemen	Kuwait	Bahrain	Qatar	U.A.E.	Oman
All Muslims	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Sunni	*		*	*		*	*	*
Shi'i	130 1.7	*		7	1	1	2	46 7.0
Alawi								
Ahmadi								
Druze								
All Christians	8 0.1			34 4.4	6 3.0	3 2.4	4 1.1	2 0.3
Orthodox				12 1.6	2 1.2	1 0.5	1 0.2	
Catholic				18 2.3	2 0.9	1 0.6	1 0.5	1 0.2
Prot/Anglican				1 0.4	2 0.9	1 1.3	2 0.6	1 0.2
Jewish			1 0.1					
Samaritan								
Yazidi								
Sabaean								
Hindu			4 0.3	4 0.5			1 0.3	2 0.3
Tribalist								
Atheist								
TOTAL (1970) POPULATION	7,740	5,762	1,436	760	215	110	300	657

Sources and key: see end of table

TABLE 1.1 (cont)

3. MIGRANT WORKERS

	Egypt	Libya		Israel	Occupied Territories	Jordan		Syria	Lebanon	Iraq		Sudan
Total		546	18.1			76	3.4			126	1.0	
Egyptian		250	8.3			69	3.1			100	0.8	
Jordanian/ Palestinian		15	0.5							8	0.1	
Syrian		15	0.5									
Lebanese		6	0.2									
Iraqi												
North Yemeni												
South Yemeni												
Sudanese		21	0.7									
Omani												
Maghrebi		66	2.2									
Somalian		5	0.2									
Pakistani		65	2.2							8	0.1	
Indian		32	1.1									
Other Asian		27	0.9									
TOTAL (1980) POPULATION	42,133	3,018		3,769	1,325	2,230		8,795	2,649	13,130		18,745

TABLE 1.1 (cont)

	Saudi Arabia		North Yemen		South Yemen	Kuwait		Bahrain		Qatar		U.A.E.		Oman	
Total	1,023	10.9	17	0.3		378	27.6	68	19.7	80	33.8	411	41.7	97	10.6
Egyptian	155	1.6	4	0.1		85	6.2	3	0.9	6	2.5	18	1.8	6	0.7
Jordanian/ Palestinian	140	1.5				55	4.0	1	0.3	8	3.4	19	1.9	2	0.2
Syrian	25	0.3				10	0.7	1	0.3	2	0.8	6	0.6		
Lebanese	33	0.4				8	0.6			1	0.4	7	0.7	2	0.2
Iraqis						40	2.9				0.1	1	0.1		
North Yemeni	325	3.5				3	0.2	1	0.3	2	0.8	5	0.5		
South Yemeni	65	0.7				35	2.6	1	0.4	1	0.7	7	0.7	1	0.1
Sudanese	56	0.6				6	0.4	1	0.3	1	0.4	2	0.2	1	0.1
Omani	10	0.1				2	0.1	1	0.3	1	0.4	19	1.9		
Maghrebi												5	0.5		
Somalian	8	0.1													
Pakistani	30	0.3				34	2.5	26	7.5	20	8.4	137	13.9	45	4.9
Indian	30	0.3				45	3.3	12	3.5	12	5.1	110	11.2	36	3.9
Other Asian	93	1.0				10	0.7	10	2.9	5	2.1	21	2.1		
TOTAL (1980) POPULATION	9,420		5,304		1,916	1,372		346		237		985		919	

Source and key: see end of table

TABLE 1.1 (cont)

4. OTHER MINORITY GROUPS

	Egypt		Libya		Israel		Occupied Territories	Jordan		Syria		Lebanon		Iraq		Sudan	
Nomads	42	0.1	91	3.0				44	2.0	176	2.0			368	2.8	1,031	5.5
Palestinians	34	0.1	16	0.5	531	14.1	*	1,112	50.0	215	2.4	68	2.5	20	0.2		
TOTAL (1980) POPULATION	42,135		3,018		3,769		1,325	2,230		8,795		2,649		13,130		18,745	

	Saudi Arabia		North Yemen		South Yemen		Kuwait		Bahrain		Qatar		U.A.E.		Oman	
Nomads	462	5.0	106	2.0	19	1.0	192	14.0	48	14.0	33	14.0	138	14.0	139	15.0
Palestinians	137	1.4	?		?		276	20.1	?		24	10.1	37	3.8	?	
TOTAL (1980) POPULATION	9,420		5,304		1,916		1,372		346		237		985		919	

KEY

* Group forming the majority of the national population
19 Size of minority group in thousands
1.9 Minority group as percentage of national population
? Unknown

SOURCES

(i) Ethnolinguistic and religious groups: N.K. David et al (1982) except Shi'i: M. Heikal (1981); Lebanon: D. McDowall (1981)
(ii) Migrant workers: Birks and Sinclair (1981)
(iii) Nomads: G.H. Blake (1982)
(iv) Palestinians: Palestinian Statistical Abstract (1981 and 1982)
(v) 1970 total population: D.B. Barrett (1982)
(vi) 1980 total population: U.S. Bureau of Census (1981)
(vii) Occupied territories: W.W. Harris (1981)

NOTES

(a) Ethnolinguistic groups: percentages estimated between 1970 and 1980; populations total calculated using national populations (1970) also given in Barrett (1982)
(b) Lebanon: percentages and total populations estimated
(c) Religious groups: percentages and total populations estimated for 1970; professing Christians rather than church members are shown, requiring some adaptation of data in Barrett (1982)
(d) Migrant workers: percentages calculated from worker population estimates for 1980 and total national populations for 1980. Fluctuations in the number of workers and the difficulty of estimating illegal immigrants mean that these figures must be treated with caution
(e) Palestinians: figures given for 1980 where possible; Egypt, Saudi Arabia, U.A.E. and Qatar 1981 (percentages therefore a little high); Libya figures for 1973
(f) Total population: the different sources for 1970 and 1980 totals lead to conflicts the 1970 estimate for North Yemen in particular is too high; the final figure for the occupied territories is for 1978 and excludes annexed areas

example Barrett estimates that 42,000 of the Egyptian migrant workers in Libya (many of them illegal) are Copts; not surprisingly they are 'non-professing' and therefore not in the 'Total Christian' line for Libya. A more serious problem occurs in estimating any religious minority in Saudi Arabia (where again many Egyptians may be Copts and many Yemenis Shi'is) as there is no freely available census and all non-Muslim religions are forbidden to organise. Again, virtually all the Hindus in the region are Indian migrant workers, who also form another ethno-linguistic group.

The final part of the table, showing nomads and Palestinians, is based on two sources, both of which give data for 1980. There is a small inconsistency for the Palestinian figures for Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar, as these relate to 1981, and thus the percentages calculated from the 1980 total population figures are marginally too high. More seriously the date for the estimate of Palestinians in Libya is that of 1973; for this reason no percentage has been calculated.

1.2 The Copts and other minorities in the Arab world today

Table 1.1 demonstrates the large size in absolute terms of the Coptic community in comparison with the other minorities in the Middle East. They form the third largest national minority in the Arab world after the Sunnis in Iraq (who are in any case politically dominant, even if numerically inferior) and the Tribalists in southern Sudan. They are more numerous than other more publicised minorities such as the Kurds in Iraq, any of the confessional minorities in the Levant, or the Palestinians in Israel and the Occupied Territories combined. Libya, Jordan and Lebanon each have a total population similar in size to the Coptic community in Egypt (compare also the total population for these countries in 1980 and the various estimates for the Copts in the early 1980s in Table 2.1c).

Compared with other large, long-resident minorities, the Copts have an unusual distribution. The Druzes are concentrated on the ridges of inner Syria (now Jebel Druze), the Shuf mountains in Lebanon and Mount Hermon in northern Palestine; the Alawis have remained isolated around Mount Ansariye in northern

Syria; the Kurds live mainly in the mountains of north-eastern Iraq, although some have been forcibly moved to the south. The Yazidis (around Mount Sinjar in Iraq), the Ismailis (a small Shi'i sect inhabiting villages in the mountains of Yemen) and the Zaydis (another Shi'i sect in the high country of Yemen) also exhibit the same characteristics of a minority strongly concentrated in one (upland) area. In contrast, although the Copts are concentrated in some parts of Egypt (namely the south and Cairo - see Chapter 3), they only rarely form the majority of inhabitants in one settlement. In addition they are represented in all areas of Egypt (albeit in very small numbers in the northern Delta) and have been so throughout the Islamic dominance of Eygpt.

However, taken as a proportion of the total population of one country the Copts have more in common with other minorities, as they inhabit the most populous country of the region and therefore their relatively large population is still only a small proportion of the whole. The Copts make up only 6.2 per cent of the population of Egypt, which is just over a third of the percentage of Palestinians in Israel and Kurds in Iraq. Other religious minorities also represent much higher proportions of total populations: the Sunnis in Iraq (35 per cent), Tribalists in Sudan (20.8 per cent), Sunnis, Shi'is and Maronites in Lebanon, and even the Alawis in Syria (11.6 per cent). Many other minorities represent a similar proportion to the Copts; some of these are religious (e.g. Druzes in Lebanon, Christians in Sudan), others are ethno-linguistic (e.g. Berbers in Libya, Kurds in Syria) and some others are migrants workers, but most are less than 6.2 per cent. The Copts are merely one of many groups in this respect.

The Copts are unusual in a different way: they are the only significant minority in their country. Apart from South Yemen, every country has at least one minority of over five per cent; only Egypt, Israel and North Yemen boast no more than one. Most of the other more densely populated countries appear to have a diverse range of minorities, whether they have long been resident in the country or are recent migrant workers.

Finally, it is interesting to compare the Copts with some of the other Christian communities in the Arab world. Some follow a

similar pattern to the Copts in having a well-defined rural stronghold and being over-represented in the cities, while others are primarily urban, but few are spread over all parts of the country. The Christians of Iraq, for example, are rarely found outside the Mosul plain, Baghdad and Basra[8]. The Maronites in Lebanon were something of an exception since before the civil war began in 1975 they not only occupied their traditional mountain stronghold in Mount Lebanon and made up a substantial proportion of the population of Beirut, but they could also be found in other rural districts to the north around Tripoli and to the south around Saida. Small minorities are present in most parts of Lebanon[9]. However, in this case colonial history must be examined; as part of the French mandate of Greater Syria in 1920, the Maronites only take up a small part of the territory. It is only by means of the deliberate creation of Lebanon by the French that the Christians formed a majority in the 1932 Lebanese census.

De Planhol (1959) accounts for these differences by the different treatment meted out by the Muslim authorities to various groups. An heretical sect of Islam would need to protect themselves in a mountain area (e.g. the Druzes and the Alawis), whereas the 'people of the book' could seek government protection and prosper in urban areas while suffering the troubles of an urban minority[10]. The Greek Orthodox in Lebanon and, above all, the Jews in centuries past demonstrate this perfectly. The Copts, however, are not merely urban, but have retained some of their ancient right to farm the Nile valley in Southern Egypt. The survival of such a large remnant from before the Islamic era in a rural setting is unique among the Christian sects.

It is worth noting that no other Christian community even approaches the number of the Copts in the Arab world (the Maronites or Sudanese Christians are the next largest group). The Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt is probably ten times larger than any other Christian denomination save those two just mentioned, despite other sects with more ready access to the West (e.g. Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant etc.) being more vocal and better publicised.

1.3 The Copts as a Minority in Egypt

1.3.1 Definition of 'Copt'

The Egyptian Christians can be viewed as one minority group, although inevitably there is no uniformity of belief or behaviour within the group. For convenience, throughout this study all Egyptian-born Christians will be termed 'Copt', although not all belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church (about 94 per cent of native-born Christians[11]). This can be justified for a number of reasons. First, many modern authorities effectively ignore non-Coptic Orthodox Christians by using the term Copt without definition or, alternatively, the term 'Christian'. However, this latter term is unsatisfactory because in the national census it is used to include foreign-born Christians, and thus it is better to reserve it for this use. Secondly, the term 'Copt' originally came from the Greek word 'Aiguptos' meaning Egyptian[12], yet since the Arab invasion of Egypt and the decline of the Greek Orthodox Church it has been synonymous in Egypt with 'native Christian'. It would therefore be etymologically justifiable to call any indigenous Christian a Copt. Thirdly, there are strong links between the denominations. Most of the converts to Catholicism and Protestantism were originally Coptic Orthodox and not Muslim[13]. There is evidence that movement between the denominations, especially by marriage, is quite common; it is certainly more common than the movement between Christianity and Islam. Thus the term 'Copt' in this study will refer to all indigenous Egyptian Christians, while the term 'Christian' will refer to both indigenous and foreign Christians living in Egypt. This will be most apparent when census data are discussed in later chapters, since the census combines both foreign and indigenous Christians into one group and hence the term Copt will not be used there.

1.3.2 Similarities and differences between Copts and Muslims in Egypt

(i) Ethnicity. The Coptic minority is not racially distinct. While it is a common claim of Coptic authors that they are the direct descendants of the ancient Egyptians[14], it is equally clear that most Muslim Egyptians have the same roots. To quote

Ibrahim (1982):

> As an ethnic group the Copts are the pure successors of the ancient Egyptians. This does not imply that Muslims are pure Arabs. At least 90 per cent of the Muslim Egyptians are of Coptic origin, so that no particular differentiation should be made between the Copts and Muslims from an ethnical point of view[15]

Indeed the attempts of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European writers to make a distinction were reflections of cultural differences, both between Copts and Muslims, and Europeans and Egyptians[16]. Egyptians today certainly cannot identify the religion of an individual by physical features alone[17], although there may be a greater chance of Copts displaying certain racial features (e.g. higher cheekbones, 'almond' shaped eyes etc.) according to some Egyptians[18].

Another characteristic of ethnicity, language, also shows no difference between Coptic and Muslim. The Coptic language died out as a spoken language some time in the Middle Ages (probably between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, but estimates vary) and made only a small impact on Egyptian Arabic. Today it is preserved only in parts of the Coptic Orthodox Church liturgy, and attempts to revive it as a spoken language have failed.

(ii) Clothing. Religious affiliation has little effect on the dress of the westernised Eygptians or on the upper and middle classes. Among the poor in Cairo there are some differences. According to Rugh (1978), writing about the poorer areas of Bulaq-Qalali:

identification can be formulated and presented. Some of the more common markers are details of dress, language, names, pictures, gestures, jewelry, tattoos, etc. There is a great deal of overlap between the sects, and omissions may be just as important as the presence of factors, so it is necessary to assess the total constellation of details[19].

She goes on to describe some of the details in clothing such as differences in shawls and dresses in women. An example of how this interacts with the origin of the style of clothing was given: a woman wearing a shawl common to Christians (because it is the type worn in Upper Egypt) was immediately recognised as a Muslim due to her bedouin style of dress. If such fine detail needs to be identified it is clear that, on the level of dress at least, the Copts are well integrated. This contrasts with previous ages when at different times the Copts were compelled to wear distinctively coloured turbans, or belts, or even wear heavy crosses around their necks[20].

(iii) Symbols. Display of a religious symbol is a more obvious distinguishing feature of the different sects. Copts tend to make greater use of religious symbols, often wearing crosses around their necks or tattooing them on the inside of the right wrist of their children. These were usually found among the fellahin and the lower-class urban dwellers, as the sign of the cross is considered by the poorer people to be a protective device against evil spirits. In the past it has also served as a mechanism to strengthen the Christians in persecution, as with a tattoo it is impossible for them to deny their faith[21]. Finally, it deliberately acts as an identifier, as many fellahin believe apocalyptic stories of an Ethiopian army invading Egypt and killing all those not marked with the sign of the cross[22].

Crosses are also apparent in buildings, especially above the doorway set into the brickwork.

Modern society has produced other symbols such as posters, pictures and ornaments for cars. Common subjects for these are the Virgin Mary and Jesus, St. George and Pope Shenouda. The Muslims, however, do not display their religion as openly, perhaps because they feel less need to do so. However, some shops have verses from the Koran displayed, and a common piece of

jewelry is a verse from the Koran worn around the neck.

Often the most distinctive symbol of all is the name given to a person. Although increasingly the names given to children are not obviously Muslim or Christian, there remain large numbers of names that the Egyptian immediately recognises as being either Christian or Muslim. Meinardus notes most of the Christian examples; they may be Arabic but relating to something Christian (e.g. Ghattas - baptized one); syncretistic but with some Coptic content (e.g. Far'aun - Pharoah); or of foreign origin from lands with a Christian heritage, including Latin, Hebrew, Greek, English and French (e.g. Mikhail - Michael). Other common names are Butrus (Peter), Hanna (John), Girgis (George) and Yaqub (Jacob, James). Names which can be either Muslim or Coptic are either Old Testament names accepted by both religions (e.g. Da'ud - David, Ibrahim - Abraham) or neutral names (e.g. Habib - friend, Sa'ad - happiness). Well-known names which occur only in the Koran are used only by Muslims (e.g. Mohammed, Ali, Mustafa etc).

(iv) Behaviour. Potentially the most important differences between the two sects lay in the realm of practical behaviour. If overt religious practices are laid aside for the moment, there seems to be very little difference, especially if we compare the comments of writers before the modern era. Today, class is a more important discriminator than religion. Both Christian and Muslim women can be veiled, but less often in the cities today. Both sects practise circumcision (male and female in poorer areas) and neither religious hierarchy forbids the use of contraceptives (although the local religious authority, priest or imam, may be more conservative). As secularisation gathers pace in Egypt, differences in behaviour are further reduced, although the Islamic revival has acted against this in recent years among part of the population.

Some customs differ because of the different legal requirements for the different communities. Laws regarding marriage, divorce, alimony, custody of children and inheritance stem from the millets which the Ottoman Empire established to administer the civil affairs of each religious group. An Egyptian is bound by his group's rules from birth to death, unless he evades them by changing his religion[23]. A Copt may

only marry once, but the Muslim can have up to four wives. Unless adultery is proven, it is almost impossible for a Copt to divorce, whereas the Muslim man can divorce relatively easily. Rugh suggests that the different family structures produce different family relationships: the Christian couple acts as a unit while the Muslim couple acts as separate parties joined together for certain purposes[24]. Furthermore, the Muslim wife will attempt to do all she can to please the husband, while the Christian wife is under less pressure[25]. It is not illegal for either Muslim or Christian to convert[26], which has encouraged a number of Christians to become Muslims merely to divorce their wives. Mixed marriages are also possible with the children being brought up in the religion of the father. However, the social constraints brought to bear to discourage such actions are powerful. The Muslim becoming a Copt will lose legally his inheritance and socially his family and friends. In effect, a Muslim woman marrying a Copt (a rare event) will have to convert, otherwise the children will be considered illegitimate in the eyes of the government; it is however acceptable for a Muslim man to marry a Copt (as this is what the Prophet Muhammad did)[27]. These laws effectively put pressure on the Coptic community since the Muslim will gain little social or economic benefit in converting, while a Copt may have much to gain. In rural and lower-class urban areas, at least, the Copts maintain strong social pressure to prevent conversion of their members[28].

Finally, there are straightforward religious practices which prompt different patterns of behaviour and easily identify the adherent. However, differences in behaviour do not prevent some overlap of function. Islam has five pillars of faith: profession of faith, prayer, fasting, pilgrimage and alms; while Copts have 'seven mysteries': baptism, confirmation, penance, eucharist, orders, matrimony and unction of the sick. Fasting is present in all the denominations (different variations on Lent for the Christians, Ramadan for the Muslims)[29]. There is clearly an element of competition here, although it must be noted that the different religions have some elements of common origin. On the local level of folk religion there is more outright overlap: Copts may ascribe magical powers to saints' names, shrines, crosses and other symbols, while there are similar corruptions in

Islam. If one 'cure' is felt to be more efficacious than another, the superstitious adherents of one religion will turn to the other for succour[30]. However, it is the strong religious boundaries such as the teaching on salvation which reinforce the social boundaries and allow such actions to take place without the sect being threatened.

In conclusion, therefore, it may be stated that the Coptic minority in Egypt is a religious one which is backed by legal and social sanctions. It is not a racial minority, nor a linguistic minority, nor a political minority in the sense that the Copts want some degree of autonomy. Indeed they are proud of their descent from the ancient Egyptians and see themselves only as Egyptians. In the words of Wakin (1963):

> In the Coptic language 'Copts' means 'people of Egypt' and the Copts use the term literally referring to themselves as the 'true Egyptians' ... Unlike the Armenians and the Jews the Copts have had little migration and no diaspora. It is both their burden and fortune to have only one home: the Nile Valley[31].

NOTES

1. Rondot, 1959, 214
2. Barrett, 1982, 108
3. Hourani, 1947, Chapter 2. Hourani's chapter on the origin of minorities in the Middle East provided a framework to this section, although he does not include migrant workers
4. Seccombe, 1982
5. Hourani, 1947, 49,87
6. Sources for Table 1.1 were: Barrett, 1982; Birks and Sinclair, 1982, 733-52; Blake, 1983; David et al, 1982; Harris 1980, 144; Heikal, 1983, 9; McDowell, 1983, 9; P.L.O. Economic Department 1982; US Bureau of Census, 1983
7. e.g. Tarbush, 1983. 29
8. Nyrop and Smith, 1979, 78-88
9. Beaumont, Blake and Wagstaff, 1976, 369, Fig 14.1
10. Planhol, 1959,91
11. David et al, 1982, 274, Table 1

12. Atiya, 1968,16
13. Wakin,1963, 140
14. e.g. Atiya, 1982
15. Ibrahim, 1982
16. e.g. Lane, 1836, 535: "I find it difficult sometimes to perceive any difference between a Copt and a Muslim Egyptian, beyond a certain downcast and sullen expression of countenance which generally marks the former" and, 551: "they are, generally speaking, of a sullen temper, extremely avaricious and abominable dissemblers, cringing or domineering according to circumstances. . . . He (a Coptic source) avows them to be generally ignorant, deceitful, faithless and abandoned to the pursuit of worldly gain, and to indulgence in sensual pleasures"
Much of this warped view of the Copts is due to their financial activities and secrecy; it may also reflect the view of the Muslims with whom Lane associated, showing the suspicion existing between the two sides
17. Rugh, 1978, 263
18. Private conversations in Egypt
19. Rugh, 1978, 263
20. Lane, 1836, 554-57
21. Meinardus, 1970,4
22. Blackman, 1929, 54
23. Wakin, 1963, 83
24. Rugh, 1978, 259
25. Rugh, 1978, 307
26. Wakin, 1963, 87
27. Wakin, 1963, 85
28. Rugh, 1978, Ch. 8
29. Rugh, 1978, 271
30. Rugh, 1978, 272
31. Wakin, 1963, 264

2 THE ENUMERATION OF COPTS

2.1 Introduction

The problem of establishing the correct number of Copts in Egypt is one that will probably never be solved, at least to the satisfaction of all Egyptians. The number calculated will always be disputed by one or more interested parties. This can be illustrated by the estimate given to the author by an ordinary (but Coptic) Cairene taxi-driver. He proudly told his western visitor that there were 25 million Copts in Egypt, although he admitted they were in the minority, assessing the Muslim population at 35 million! While both figures are absurdly high (over 40 per cent of a 60 million population Coptic) there is a more serious point to the comment. The man probably knew he was exaggerating but, like most Copts, he believed that he was in a larger minority than the government maintain. Moreover, he was immediately ready to offer an answer which would be plausible to an uninformed visitor. In short, it is a question which is very sensitive to the Copt and therefore also to a government concerned about potential confessional discord. If figures larger than those published in the census were proven, pressure would mount on the government to make political concessions demanded by some Copts. Whilst most Muslim Egyptians are less concerned (as the majority they have less reason for fear), members of the Ikhwan (Muslim Brotherhood) and other extremist Muslims are always ready to oppose any increase in the published number of Copts. Under these circumstances, what is believed is as important as what is true, and much that is little more than propaganda has been published in the last forty years. It is therefore necessary to consider the past as well as the present in order to evaluate contemporary estimates.

2.2 Estimates prior to the Twentieth Century (Table 2.1a)

All estimates prior to the official census (the first reliable census was in 1897, although there was one before this) must be treated with a great deal of caution. They may be based on a traveller's impression of a limited part of Egypt, or upon

TABLE 2.1 ESTIMATES OF THE NUMBER OF COPTS

a) Estimates prior to the 20th century

Date	Number of Copts	Number of Egyptians	Percentage of Copts	Source
C8th	5-6 million		98	Vatikiotis
c. C10th			50	Staffa, Atiya
1677	10-15,000			Vansleb
c. 1700	150,000			Amba Isidurus
1798	215,000 (inc. Jews)	2-5 million	(9)	Jomard
1799	200,000	2-3 million	(7-10)	Ryne
1835	150,000	4 million	(4) 7	Lane
1840	150,000	3 million	5	Clot
1855	217,000	5 million	(4)	Patriarchate
1894	7-800,000			Testuin

b) Census results

1897	731,235	10,016,917	7.3	Census
1907	881,692	11,189,978	7.9	Census
1917	1,025,853	12,717,864	8.1	Census
1927	1,181,910	14,177,864	8.3	Census
1937	1,303,970	15,920,694	8.2	Census
1947	1,501,635	18,966,767	7.9	Census
1960	1,905,182	25,984,101	7.3	Census
1966	2,018,562	29,950,198	6.7	Census
1976	2,315,560	36,656,180	6.3	Census

c) Recent non-government estimates

1962	4 million	24 million	16	Wakin
1965	over 4 million			Ayrout
1973	6 million	40 million	(15)	Masriya
1975	3-3½ million			Betts
1975	7 million			Pope Shenouda
1975	8 million	40 million	20	President Carter
1980	7.5 million	42 million	17.8	David et al
1982	8 million			Ibrahim
1982	10 million	(43 million)	24	Bishop Gregorius
1983	9 million	(45 million)		Karas

Notes: bracketed figures are calculated from figures in two other columns, not published in the original texts.
: census figures include foreign as well as Egyptian Christians.

biased sources, or upon Christian poll-tax returns in which there is a self-evident incentive for inaccuracy. The figures should therefore be treated as only general indications of the magnitude of the Coptic population; however in this light they offer useful supporting evidence to twentieth-century figures.

The Christian population shortly after the Arab invasion and before the first major instances of persecution (i.e. at the beginning of the eighth century) is believed to have been between five and six million[1]. They were undoubtedly the substantial majority, yet by the tenth century they were probably in the minority[2]. It is probable that, after the advent of the Ottomans in 1517, there was only a gradual decline in the proportion of Copts as there were no more serious incidents of violent persecution initiated by the government. The institutional inferiority of Christians in an Islamic society of course remained but, after eight hundred years of occupation, this was no longer in itself a reason for serious decline; Christian social and economic defence mechanisms effectively countered it.

The oldest available estimate by a European traveller is from the seventeenth century. Vansleb gives a figure of between 10 and 15,000 Copts[3], but this number does not tally with the succeeding estimates in the next century. It has been suggested that the figure could be a misreading, and should have been 100,000 to 150,000[4]. The Coptic author, Amba Isidurus, does indeed suggest 150,000 at this time but gives no basis for his estimate[5]. The French invasion of Egypt by Napoleon in 1798 led to a more complete census using a precise village list. This gave a figure of 2,500,000 Egyptians[5], including 215,000 Christians and Jews (i.e. about nine per cent of the population non-Muslim)[6]. Ryme in 1799 gave another estimate of 200,000 Copts out of a population of between two and three million[7]. Lane, writing in 1835, gives a figure of 150,000 Copts out of about four million, but then contradicts this proportion by saying they made up about one in fourteen of the total population[8]. Clotbey writing just after Lane, estimates 150,000 out of three million inhabitants[9] (i.e. one in twenty) and even the Patriarchate only estimates just over 217,000 Copts in 1855, basing its figures on the last year of the jizya (poll tax on Christians)[10]. Finally, just before the 1897 census, Testoin estimated 7-800,000

Christians[11].

It is significant that none of these estimates can be construed as giving the Copts more than ten per cent of the total population, while later nineteenth-century assessments are considerably less. In retrospect, the figures quoted by Jomard, Rymer and Lane (at one-fourteenth) seem remarkably close to the census figures a century or more later. If the Copts in the twentieth century actually comprise upwards of 20 per cent of the population, as some Copts claim, their proportion must have risen considerably, for it is difficult to imagine relatively unbiased European observers miscalculating by a factor of two or three.

2.3 Census Results[12] (Table 2.1b)

The census results of 1897 and 1960 show exactly the same percentage of Christians: 7.3. Between these two dates the percentage rose by exactly one point (peaking in 1927) and since 1960 it has fallen by one point to 6.3 in 1976. At the outset one must remark upon the lack of change, consistent with a minority group well integrated into its society. However, differences in emigration and birth and death rates between Copts and Muslims do occur, and these will be discussed later.

First, there is a more fundamental problem than the detailed change in the proportion of Christians shown in the census. The majority of Copts simply disbelieve all of these figures, thinking them a gross underestimation. Are there any grounds for this complaint?

In essence there are two possible ways in which an underestimation may occur: the government could be deliberately reducing the figures for political reasons or, alternatively, there is a factor in data collection which inhibits returns of some Christians. The first alternative has been effectively discredited by Martin for the returns prior to 1966[13]. The consistency of the census returns between 1897 and 1960 means that not one but all of them would have had to have been faked, an immense task which would be almost impossible to keep secret. Also it is difficult to put forward a motive for the British civil servants, in charge of the census up to 1947, wanting to doctor the statistics. One of the motives advanced for the British

occupation in 1882 was the protection of minorities, and it was also an important condition for Egypt's 'independence' in 1923. The Christian proportion became particularly important at that time, as high government posts (in ministries, embassies, administration and in the courts) were allocated on a strict basis of one Copt to thirteen Muslims (i.e. eight per cent) rather than solely by seniority. This proportion was passed in parliament following the new constitution and in line with the 1917 census returns, as a compromise to some extremist Copts claiming one to eleven and their Muslim counterparts one to fifteen.

In these circumstances the 1927 census becomes critical. It is generally agreed that the 1927 and 1937 censuses are among the most accurate. Martin suggests that the English director of the census would have given orders to his officials to 'round up' the numbers of Christians where possible, since there was a known tendency for Christians not to admit their total number of children so that some could avoid military service[14]. Given the politically sensitive nature of the results and the British desire to protect the minorities, this seems plausible, although this avoidance may still be a source of under-estimation. More important is the fact that the local data collectors were from the tax offices. The Copts dominated tax collection from the very beginning of the Arab invasion and in 1927 many (if not most) of the tax collectors would still have been Copts. It is unreasonable to suppose that they would have been party to any deliberate tampering with the figures so that the total number of Copts was reduced. Finally, the 1927 census is backed up by an independent estimate of 912,000 Coptic Orthodox Christians, which when other denominations and the then numerous foreign Christians are taken into account brings us very close to the census figure of almost 1.2 million[15].

The succeeding censuses show a drop of two per cent down to 1976 but this can be explained with known demographic trends. There is no more reason to suspect doctoring of these censuses on a grand scale than there is for earlier ones. In fact it may be significant that the extreme claims of underrepresentation only came from the Christians after they were under political pressure following the revolution.

The second possibility, that underestimation was due to local collection problems, is more difficult to refute. Use of Coptic data collectors in earlier censuses would have reduced difficulties in remote villages where results, rather than coming from each household, may have come through the local sheikh. Hanna (1980) believes that recent censuses may have underestimated the number of Christians because the religion of an individual is not always asked (since it may be socially unacceptable to ask such a question). Rather, the religion is guessed from the person's name, which often identifies religion correctly (Chapter 1), but where religion is uncertain the person is assumed to be Muslim[16]. Coptic suspicion has been aroused by the very low numbers returned from the Delta towns, yet their own figures show that there is a greater underestimation in Giza and Beni Suef (Chapter 3). If the main problem is only in the Delta, where confession of Christianity may be socially difficult, the numbers involved are comparatively small. The difference between census and church statistics for Lower Egypt (excluding Cairo and Alexandria) is 415,000 (Table 3.1), adding just over two percentage points to the total government figures. It is unlikely that this difference has any basis in reality (cf. comments below on the statistics published in the World Christian Encyclopaedia). Where the Christians form a larger minority, questions about religion in the census are unlikely to cause a social problem.

In discussing the census it remains to account for the two per cent drop in the proportion of Christians since 1927. To do this it is helpful to look at some sample governorates in order to identify the types of governorate which have least kept pace with the general Muslim increase in population. (No governorate has seen a decline in the number of Christians, only in their proportion). Figure 2.1 shows this only too clearly. Assyout, representing Upper Egypt, and Beni Suef in Middle Egypt have shown only a small decline (and Minya, not shown, has steadily increased). Similarly Dakahlia in the Delta, starting with low percentages, has seen a drop of one per cent. This is the general trend in the Delta, although there are exceptions such as Kalyubia. However, it is obvious that the major loss is in the big cities: Cairo, Alexandria and the Canal towns (Ismailia and

Port Said show the same general pattern as Suez).

The principal reason for this precipitous decline has been emigration. It must be remembered that the census returns include foreign Christians, who in 1937 numbered 152,683, 11 per cent of all Christians. The most important elements were Greek and Italian entrepreneurs and British civil servants, troops and businessmen. Most of these were residing in Cairo, Alexandria and the Canal ports. The British presence was slowly reduced after Eygptian independence in 1923, culminating in the last departure of troops from Port Said in 1955. The gradual break-down of law and order after the Second World War discouraged foreign investment in Egypt. Nationalisation of foreign capital by Nasser in 1956-7 stimulated further emigration of foreign businessmen. Those who took Egyptian nationality to avoid this often only delayed eventual emigration as nationalisation also hit indigenous capital in 1961. Many of the foreign-run schools and hospitals were also taken over by nationals. By 1976 there were only 21,000 foreigners resident in Egypt; if this had been the case in 1937, the percentage of Christians would have been reduced by almost one full percent.

It was not only the foreign Christians who emigrated during Nasser's regime. Sequestration of the property of the wealthiest Jewish and Coptic families took place in 1962 before a similar move on wealthy Muslim families. Sweeping nationalisation especially affected the land-owning and entrepreneurial Coptic class. The 1966 census shows 294,070 Egyptians living abroad (before the large-scale emigration caused by oil money), a majority of whom one commentator thinks to be Christian[17]. There are now major Coptic Orthodox churches in Lebanon, Canada, the USA and Australia. In the different Catholic Uniate churches alone, the following emigrations from Egypt are estimated: 3,000 Syriac Catholics (between 1963 and 1970); over 2,000 Armenian Catholics (between 1960 and 1970); and 2,000 Coptic Catholics (in the late 1960s)[18]. The churches in the Suez Canal region were devastated by the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Many Christians left, never to return, as they had found security elsewhere (most likely in Cairo). For example, the Catholic parishes in the Suez Canal region were all abandoned although they have since been reoccupied[19]. Overall it is worth noting that for the 1976

proportion to rise to that of 1960 (i.e. from 6.3 to 7.3 per cent) there must only be another 360,000 Christians. Emigration could easily have accounted for two-thirds of this.

Two other factors are also significant: the rate of conversions from Christianity to Islam, and the higher Muslim rate of natural increase. The World Christian Encyclopaedia gives two conflicting estimates of the conversion rate per annum, 7,000 and 5,800[20]. As these are church statistics (see below) they are unlikely to be overestimates and should account for at least another 100,000 in the sixteen years spoken of above. It is likely that many of them were migrants to Cairo or the other large cities, who more easily succumbed to subtle Muslim socio-economic pressures outside their Christian village society.

The conversion and emigration rates alone are sufficient to dispel any doubts about the proportion of Christians in the 1976 census. However, in addition, the natural increase rates registered in the same year show that the Christians were not keeping pace with the Muslims. It has been argued in the past that the lower Christian fertility (linked to the better education, on average, of Christians) is counterbalanced by a lower death rate, especially infant mortality, for similar reasons[21]. Table 2.2 shows clearly that this is not the case. The death rate columns include infant mortality. Nevertheless it is the differential between the birth rates that separates the two communities. The Christian death rate is only slightly lower than the Muslim (one per 1000) and in some governorates is higher; more universal medical care and public amenities have probably helped to narrow the gap. The birth rate, however, continues to average a 12 per 1000 difference, accounting for the Muslim natural increase rate being 11.2 per 1000 higher. If these natural increase rates were to remain constant until 1986, the Coptic proportion (excluding any emigration) would fall to 5.7 per cent. This is, of course, an extremely coarse measure, taking only the natural increase determined in 1976 (which may, for some reason have been an exceptional year), and ignoring any factors subsequent to 1976 (for example, it is known that there has been a "baby boom" in Egypt in recent years). Nevertheless, no Copt should be surprised if there is another sharp fall in the Christian proportion in the next census.

Table 2.2 CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM RATES OF NATURAL INCREASE

Sample governorates (after Fig 2.1)	Christians			Muslims			Net Muslim gain (Natural increase per thousand)
	Birth Rate per 1000	Death Rate per 1000	Natural Increase per 1000	Birth Rate per 1000	Death Rate per 1000	Natural Increase per 1000	
Cairo	20.1	9.1	11.0	33.3	10.8	22.5	12.5
Alexandria	18.6	9.8	8.9	29.0	8.8	20.2	11.3
Suez	21.8	7.2	14.6	36.2	11.4	24.8	10.2
Dakahlia	21.8	12.8	9.0	37.8	10.7	26.8	17.8
Beni Suef	28.6	15.2	13.4	42.1	14.2	27.9	14.5
Assyout	29.9	11.8	18.1	40.9	13.7	27.2	9.1
All Egypt	26.3	11.3	15.0	38.4	12.2	26.2	11.2

Source: C.A.P.M.A.S.[22]

24. Recent Non-Government Estimates (Table 21c)

Having dealt with the reliability and implications of the census data, it is necessary to turn to the various Christian estimates. Table 21c gives a selection of the more recent, but there are many more. The massive discrepancies, always above the official figure, strain credibility. Many are obviously based on the author's impression, or influenced by an intimate knowledge of Coptic strongholds where the proportion is high. The political importance of a high figure may well influence Coptic pronouncements from outside Egypt (e.g. Ibrahim, Karas) and pronouncements which will be well publicised (e.g. Pope Shenouda and President Carter)[23].

Few sources give details of how they came by their figures, but when they do, these may reveal lamentable mistakes. For example:

> Their (Protestant and Catholic sources in Egypt) verdict is an estimate of close to four million Copts, about a million more than the government estimate for a population of 24 million. The accuracy of the estimate of four million Copts was supported by the belated results of the 1960 Egyptian census[24].

Yet the 1960 census gave a figure of 1,905,182 Christians (nowhere near four or even three million); the total population was given as 25,984,101 (much nearer 26 million than 24); the census referred to all Christians, not just Copts; finally it was published fairly promptly. Yet the author manages to come up with a percentage of over sixteen per cent.

Deserving much closer scrutiny are the statistics compiled in the World Christian Encyclopaedia[25]. Among the five contributors was Bishop Samuel, one of the most important bishops and a confidant of President Sadat. If the Coptic Orthodox Church has a complete membership list, he would certainly have access to it. Statistics are duly given, not only for each Coptic Orthodox diocese but also for every other denomination and confessional group in Egypt. It is claimed that the Coptic Orthodox figures are based on "carefully kept membership

lists"[26]

They estimate the proportion of professing Christians in 1970 at 6.6 per cent, which falls neatly between the census results of 1966 and 1976 at 6.7 per cent and 6.3 per cent respectively. The difference lies in a second category, 'crypto-christians', who will not admit to being Christian in the census but are nevertheless members of the church. These are said to make up another twelve per cent, making a total Christian proportion of 18.6 per cent, 94 per cent of whom are Coptic Orthodox. Doubt has already been expressed that such a large number would not profess their faith, especially in earlier censuses. Social and economic discrimination alone seem insufficient reasons, certainly outside the Delta. Moreover, it is unlikely that the church could carry out such an accurate census. Many marriages take place outside the local parish and mass baptisms occur at a place of pilgrimage; local priests could probably only make a qualitative assessment[27]. Further suspicion can be cast on the published statistics by closer examination. Total affiliated church members (i.e. including children) are, for all but two dioceses, rounded to the nearest 10,000 (the other two are to the nearest 1,000). Numbers of congregations, adults and affiliated members are given for each diocese, and some of these are identical. For example, the four dioceses of Abu Tig, Menoufia, Dakahlia and Fayoum all have 35 congregations, 70,000 adults and 120,000 members! The claim of 'carefully kept membership lists' cannot be taken seriously. Despite this, the figures have some use, as they can at least be compared with census results to see where there is most conflict, and one may assume that they should reflect the relative importance of dioceses in terms of church members fairly accurately.

2.5. Conclusion

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the proportion of Christians shown in the census comes close to the truth. There is no evidence of deliberate doctoring of statistics, and only limited scope for claims that some Christians for various reasons were not recorded as such. The census proportion of 6.3 per cent for 1976 can be taken as a reliable minimum figure, with

an absolute maximum of 10 per cent. Since 1976 the proportion of Christians has probably dropped further, mainly due to a low natural increase rate and conversion. In 1983 the total population of Egypt was estimated at 46 million[28]; of these we would estimate that there were between 2.7 million and 4.6 million Copts, although almost certainly the former of the two figures is closer to the truth.

NOTES

1. Vatikiotis, 1976, 15
2. Atiya, 1968, 83; Staffa, 1977, 37 speaks of the disappearance of the Coptic majority by the end of the Abbasid period (AD 969)
3. Vansleb, 24 as quoted in Martin, 1967
4. Martin, 1967, 68
5. Isidurus as quoted in Martin, 1967, 69
6. Jomard, 1822, 138-39
7. Ryme, as quoted in Martin, 1967, 69
8. Lane, 1836, 23, 529
9. Clot, 1840, as quoted in Martin, 1967, 69
10. Butcher, 1897, Vol 2, 393
11. Fowler, 1901
12. C.A.P.M.A.S., 1976a and previous
13. Martin, 1967, 70ff
14. Martin, 1967, 71
15. Figures quoted from Martin, 1967,72
16. Hanna, 1980, 64-65 even mentions a Coptic bishop who had been registered as a Muslim!
17. Ducruet, 1967
18. David et al, 1982
19. David et al, 1982, 275
20. David et al, 1982, 274-75. One estimate is a footnote. Presumably the two estimates were provided by different contributors
21. Betts, 1975, 65
22. C.A.P.M.A.S., 1976a, 1980

23. Wakin, 1963, 24-25; Ayrout, 1965, xviii; Masriya, 1976; Betts, 1975; Shenouda III (Pope), 1977; President Carter quoted in Naguib, 1981, 7
24. Wakin, 1963
25. David et al, 1982
26. Ibid
27. Martin, 1967
28. C.A.P.M.A.S., 1983

3. THE SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE COPTS

3.1. Data Sources

The conflicting data described in Chapter Two complicate any analysis of the distribution of the Copts in Egypt. Only two sources give sufficient data to make mapping possible: the 1976 Census of Egypt[1] and the World Christian Encyclopaedia[2]. The reliability of these data has already been discussed. Although the church figures have been shown to be exaggerated, they will still be analysed in order to ascertain the regions with the greatest apparent discrepancies. However, the focus of the historical explanation in the latter part of the chapter will be the census figures.

There are problems of data comparability between the two data sources which are summarised in the footnotes to Table 3.1. D.B. Barrett, editor of the World Christian Encyclopaedia[3], points out that ecclesiastical statistics in general may be collected over several years prior to the stated date to which they refer in the individual country's entry, which for Egypt is 1970. Thus there are at least six years, and probably more, between the collection of the data sets. Secondly, the diocesan boundaries did not match the governorate boundaries in 1970, as they do today. There were small differences in Lower Egypt: two dioceses include more than one governorate and the Cairo governorate is made up of two dioceses (Cairo and Helwan), but boundaries do not deviate except in an almost uninhabited region between Damietta and Kafr el Sheikh (see Figure 3.1 for the location of governorates and Table 3.1). In Upper Egypt the differences are greater. The governorate boundaries between Assyout, Souhag, Kena and Aswan do not coincide with diocesan boundaries, making direct statistical comparisons impossible without more detailed church data (which has not been published). Owing to the larger number of Christians in Upper Egypt, there are more dioceses than governorates, and where possible these have been amalgamated to approximate the governorates for mapping and tabulating purposes. This still leaves the dioceses of Girga, Tima and Tahta (Table 3.1). Thirdly, the census deals with all Christians in Egypt, including foreigners, while the church

figures only account for the Coptic Orthodox. However, the number of foreign Christians is an extremely small proportion (21,370 in 1976[4]) and the non-Coptic Orthodox make up only 6 per cent of all Egyptian Christians (about 400,000[5]). These differences are far outweighed by the fact that church statistics show on average over twice as many Christians as the census.

3.2. The Distribution According to the Census Statistics

There are three maps describing the distributions of Christians shown in the census, Figures 3.2, 3.3 and 3.5. In each, the inhabited area, rather than the total area of each governorate has been used[6]. As much of Egypt is virtually uninhabited desert, inclusion of it would distort the visual impression and, in the case of the population density map, misrepresent the true situation. The inhabited area has been taken as the cultivated area (as seen from satellite imagery) plus the major urban areas. Unfortunately, this has left the desert urban areas (in particular Port Said, Suez and Sadat City) as points and unmapped, although the relevant figures can be found in Table 3.1.

All three maps highlight the basic distribution familiar to all Egyptians: there are a large number of Copts in Upper Egypt, especially in Minya, Assyout and Souhag, and in Cairo and Alexandria; there are fewer in the remainder of the Delta region. However, within the basic pattern there are many important details unrecognised and unmentioned.

The percentage of the total number of Christians in each governorate (Fig 3.2) shows the importance of the areas mentioned above. 50.9 per cent of all Christians live to the south of the Beni Suef - Minya border. Cairo is the governorate with most Christians (22.1 per cent) but Minya has only five per cent less. Alexandria, although the most important governorate in the north, has only 6.8 per cent of all Christians. There are two other important points highlighted by this distribution. First, although numbers are low generally in the Delta, there are only two inhabited governorates (Damietta and Kafr el Sheikh) with less than 1 per cent of the total Christian population, and these are relatively lowly populated by Muslims and Christians. In

3.1 The Governorates of Egypt

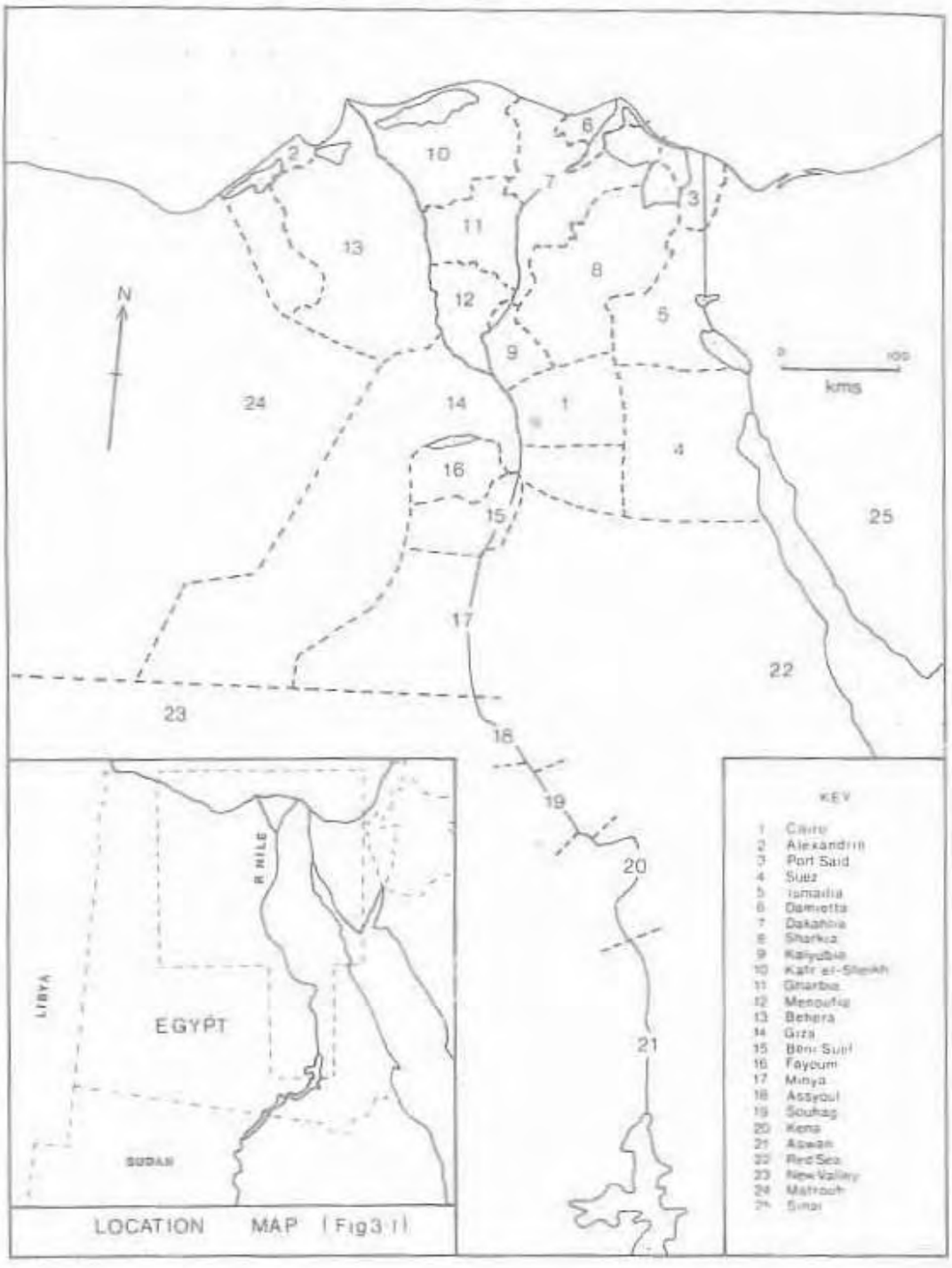


Table 1.1

The Distribution of Christians in Egypt

Census and Church Statistics[a]

GOVERNORATE	Population (000)	Inhabited area (km²)	Density (per km²)	Percentage of all Christians	DIOCESE[d]	Population (000)	Inhabited area (km²)	Density (per km²)	Percentage of all Copts (= Orthodox)
Cairo	515	214	2404	22.1	Cairo, Helwan[1]	1000	214	4669	17.2
Alexandria	156	314	496	6.8	Alexandria	500	314	1591	8.6
Port Said	11	72	153	0.5	Included in				
Suez	8	307	28	0.4	Sharkia and				
Ismailia	10	1442	7	0.4	Mohafazat[2]				
Damietta	1	589	2	0.1	Damietta & Kafr El Sheikh	20	1029	5	0.3
Dakahlia	31	3471	9	1.3	Dakahlia	130	3471	35	2.1
Sharkia	36	4180	9	1.6	Sharkia & Monufiazat	100	4180	17	1.7
Kalyubia	46	1001	46	2.0	Kalyubia	150	1001	150	2.6
Kafr El Sheikh	9	3437	3	0.4	Damietta & Kafr El Sheikh above				
Gharbia	43	1947	22	1.9	Gharbia	60	1942	31	1.0
Monufia	36	1532	23	1.5	Monufia	120	1532	78	2.1
Behera	36	4590	8	1.6	Behera	110	4590	24	1.9
Giza	91	1058	88	4.0	Giza	600	1058	567	10.3
Beni Suef	61	1322	47	2.7	Beni Suef	400	1322	303	6.9
Fayoum	43	1827	24	1.9	Fayoum	120	1827	66	2.1
Minya	398	2262	176	17.2	Minya	700	2262	310	12.1
Assyout	139	1553	118	14.6	Assyout[4] Abu Tig, Tima & Tahta[5]	120	498	241	2.1
Souhag	271	1547	176	11.8	Souhag[6]	536	940	570	9.2
					Girga[7]	80	631	127	1.4
Kena	129	1851	70	5.6	Kena & Qua	280	841	333	4.8
Aswan	34	679	50	1.5	Luxor, Isna & Aswan[8]	124	1419	87	2.1
Red Sea	2	203685	-	0.1	Included in				
New Valley	2	376505	-	-	other				
Matrouh	1	212112	-	-	diocese				
Sinai	1	-	-	-					
	2316	827490.8	2.8	100		5803	827490.8	7.0	99.9

Notes for maps and table

a. Primary sources: 1976 Census
World Christian Encyclopaedia

b. Taken from census material. A few cases are omitted. For mapping purposes cultivated and coastal areas have been used as a close approximation.

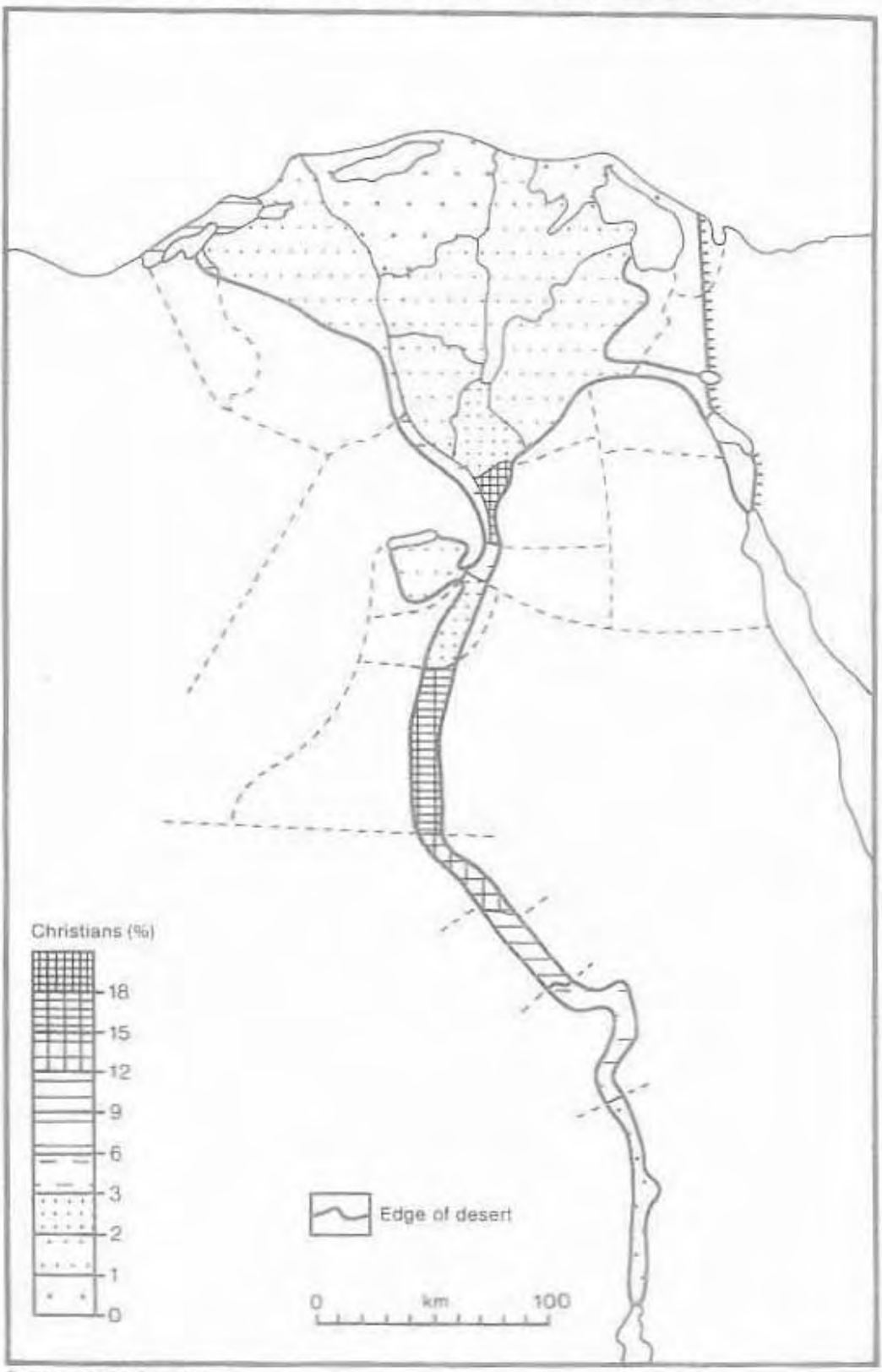
c. The census includes foreign Christians (21,370 in 1976).

d. Diocesan boundaries were only realigned with internal political boundaries in 1971. For purposes of comparability the following adjustments have been made:
1. Cairo and Helwan dioceses amalgamated to correspond with Cairo governorate.
2. Port of Sharkia and Mohafazat diocese.
3. A contiguous diocese but in governorates separated by a virtually uninhabited part of Dakahlia.
4. Includes Assyout diocese and two smaller ones: Manfalut and Abnub, and Dairut and Sanabo.
5. A small diocese occupying part of Assyout governorate and part of Souhag governorate.
6. Includes Souhag diocese and two smaller ones: Akhmim and Saqulta, and Kalyana.
7. A small diocese occupying part of Souhag governorate and part of Kena governorate.
8. Occupying the southern part of Kena governorate and all of Aswan governorate.
9. The very small numbers of Copts here make their omission unimportant.

e. As note b, except that dioceses Assyout and below are estimates.

f. i.e. 94 per cent of all Egyptian Christians.

3.2 The Percentage of all Christians in each Governorate



Source : 1976 Census

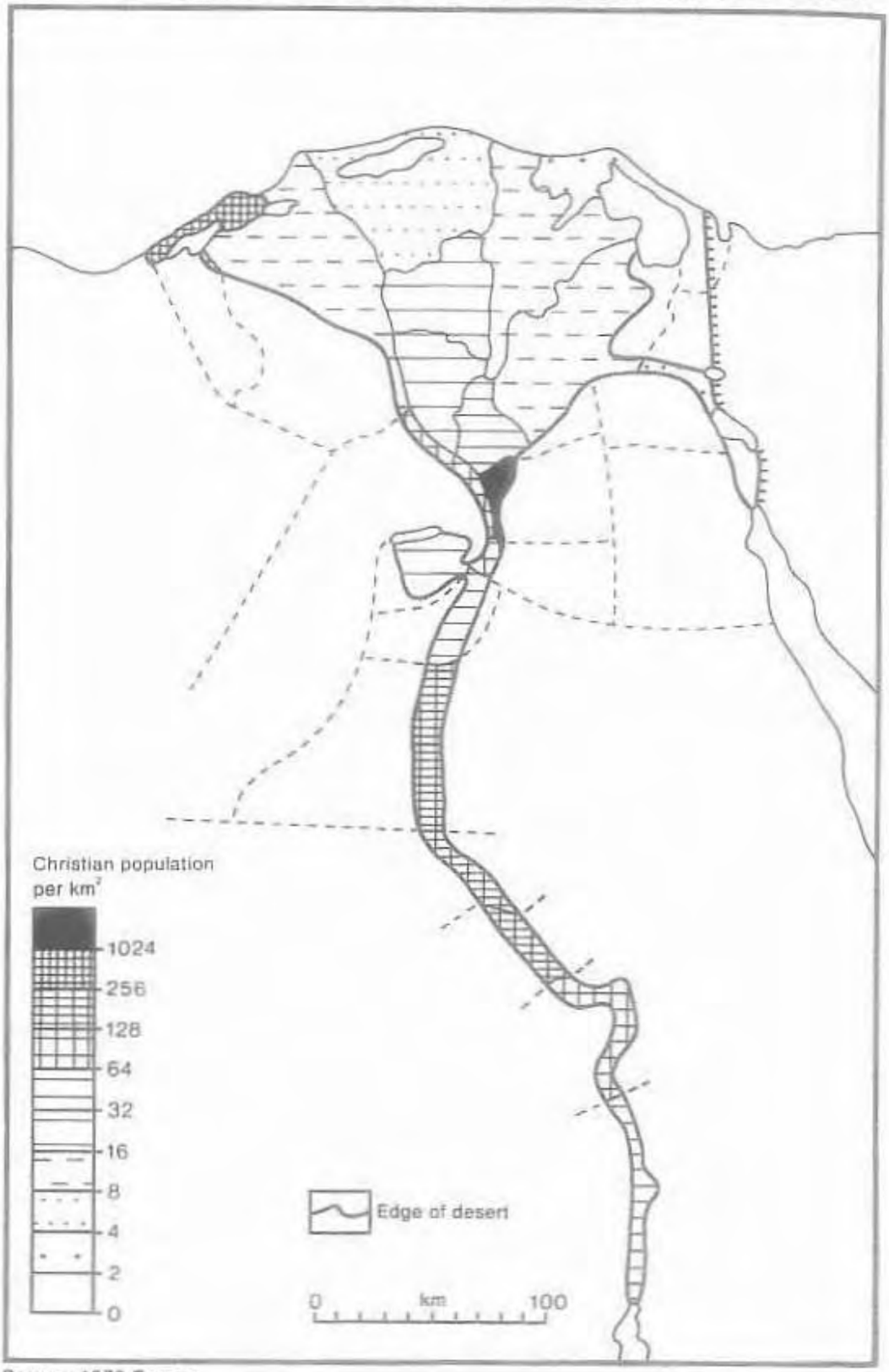
other words there is a significant proportion of Christians in most of the inhabited governorates. Secondly, fewer Christians are found in the far south (i.e. Kena and Aswan) compared with Minya, Assyout and Souhag. Kena and Aswan together have only 7.1 per cent of all Christians.

The density of the Christian population (Fig 3.3) reveals more closely the relative importance of each governorate for the Christian community. The wide spread of results revealed in Table 3.1 has necessitated use of a geometric scale in mapping, with each class boundary double the next (except in the last, which is quadruple).

Cairo and Alexandria dominate to an even greater extent than in the previous map. Cairo is two classes higher than Alexandria, while Alexandria is in turn one class higher than the next governorate. The dominance of these two governorates is partly because they are totally urban; inevitably, they have a greater overall population density than other governorates, and the Copts are included in this. Yet Port Said and Suez are also urban governorates and, while the former does have a surprisingly high density for a northern governorate (155 Christians/km^2), Suez is low (28/km^2). Neither approaches the density of Alexandria, let alone Cairo. At the other end of the scale, excluding the unpeopled desert governorates, Kafr el Sheikh and Damietta are two class orders below the next governorate.

Between these two extremes all classes are represented in the data. Figure 3.4 shows that there is a tendency for three governorates to cluster within each class, showing the class boundaries chosen to be particularly meaningful. These groupings are, starting with the least dense in population, Dakahlia, Behera and Sharkia (the Delta governorates furthest north after Damietta and Kafr el Sheikh); Menoufia, Gharbia and Fayoum (the first two further south in the Delta, the latter somewhat separated from the rest of the Nile Valley in Upper Egypt); Aswan, Beni Suef and Kalyubia (adjacent to the Christian heartlands); Giza and Kena (which represent extensions of the main Christian areas in Cairo and Upper Egypt); and finally Assyout, Minya and Souhag. Thus a very clear picture emerges of two principle heartlands, Cairo and the three governorates in Upper Egypt and a distance-decay effect away from these. This is

3.3 The Density of the Christian Population in each Governorate



Source : 1976 Census

3.4 The Density of the Christian Population : Rank and Clustering

Density of Christian population/km^2 (logarithmic scale).

Key :

1	Cairo	12	Gharbia	*	over 1024
2	Alexandria	13	Menoufia		
3	Assyout	14	Dakahlia		
4	Souhag	15	Sharkia		
5	Minya	16	Behera		
6	Giza	17	Damietta		
7	Kena		Kafr El Sheikh		
8	Aswan	p	Port Said		
9	Beni Suef	s	Suez		
10	Kalyubia	i	Ismailia		
11	Fayoum	a	Abu Tig		
		g	Girga		

Sources: David et al (1982)
Census of all Egypt (1976)

noticeable to the south in Aswan and, especially, northwards of Cairo in the Delta. In this framework Alexandria and Port Said can be seen as urban 'outliers' with relatively large densities of Christians and Beni Suef as a 'col' between the two greatest densities. Fayoum however has rather too low a density to fit within this general picture.

The proportion of Christians within the total population of Egypt (Fig 3.5 and Table 3.2) sheds light on the overall importance of Christians among their Muslim neighbours in different parts of Egypt. Once again Cairo, Minya, Assyout and Souhag are the most important Christian governorates. The Upper Egyptian governorates, not Cairo, have the highest proportion of Christians, with Assyout the highest at 20 per cent. It is significant that no governorate even approaches having a Christian majority. Only in a small number of towns and subdistricts of Cairo is this the case. Betts (1975)[7], using 1960 census data, cites eleven settlements of over 3,000 inhabitants which have a Christian majority: Naqada, El Rahmaniya, El Kashah, El Hammam, El Izba, Balut, El Muharraq, Dayr El Barsha, El Bayadiya, Abu Qurqas and Manhara. All of these are located between the cities of Luxor and Minya in Upper Egypt. The 1976 census for Cairo reveals two small subdistricts in Rod el Farag and Shubra where the Christian proportion is 51 per cent and 55 per cent respectively. Otherwise in the whole of Cairo, including most of Rod el Farag and Shubra, the Christians are in a minority.

The discrepancy between the Delta and Upper Egypt (Table 3.2) is further emphasised by the fact that, although 42 per cent of the total population of Egypt live in the Delta, only ten per cent of the Christians do, while 22 per cent of the total population live in Upper Egypt compared to 51 per cent of the Christians. In the north the governorates of Alexandria, Port Said and Suez stand out as having a larger proportion of Christians, confirming earlier indications that Christians tend to be more urban than Muslims. Of those Delta governorates not wholly urban, Kalyubia stands out (as, to a lesser extent, it has in previous maps) as having a relatively high proportion of Christians, whilst Damietta and Kafr el Sheikh are governorates having low proportions.

3.5 The Proportion of Copts in each Governorate

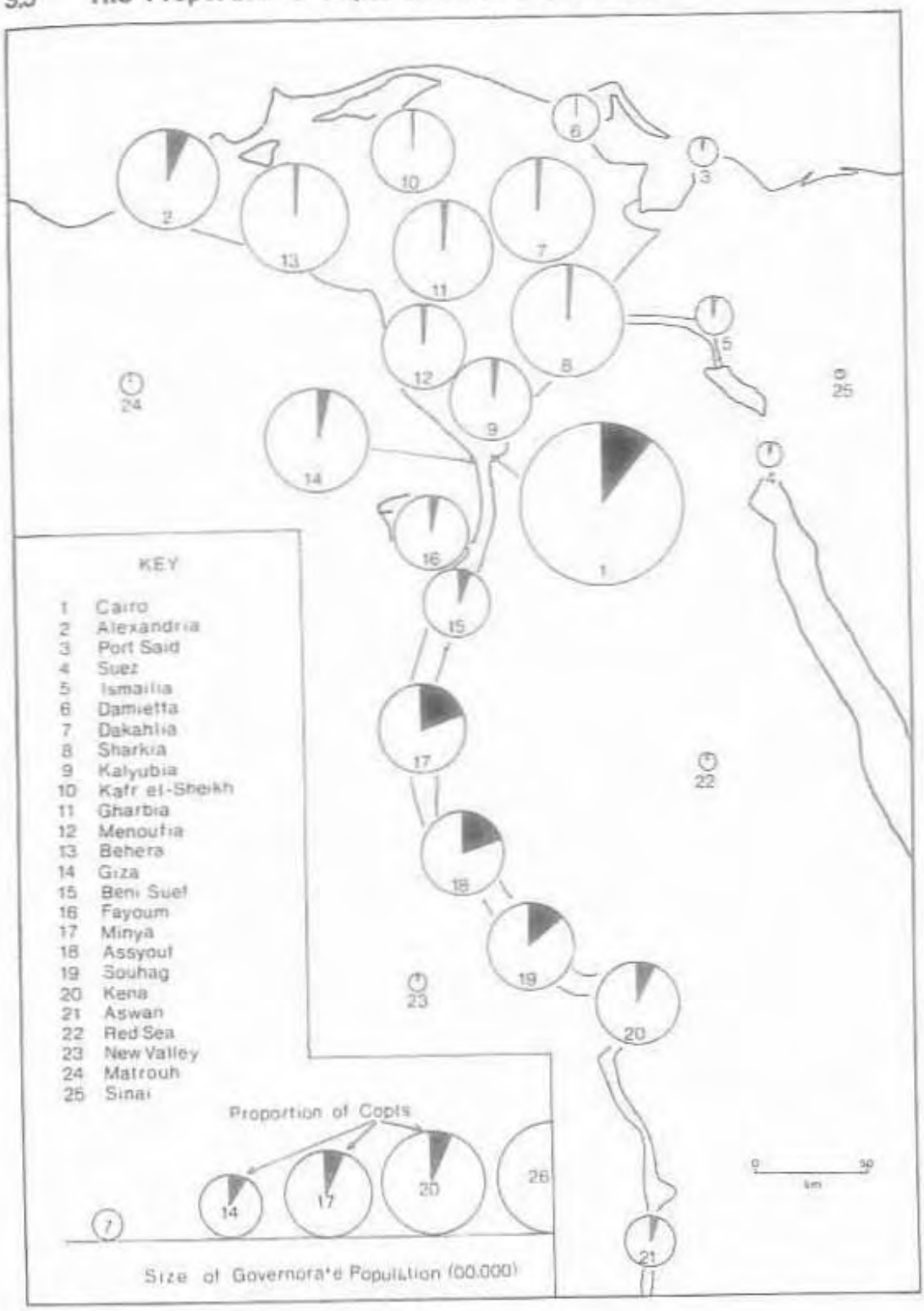


Table 3.2 The proportion of Christians in the total population, 1976

Governorate	Total Population '000	Christian Population '000	Christian Percentage
Cairo	5,084	515	10.1
Alexandria	2,319	156	6.7
	7,403	671	9.1
Port Said	263	11	4.2
Suez	194	8	4.3
Ismailia	352	10	2.8
Canal Ports	809	29	3.6
Damietta	557	1	0.1
Dakahlia	2,713	31	1.1
Sharkia	2,621	36	1.4
Kalyubia	1,674	46	2.8
Kafr El Sheikh	1,403	9	0.7
Gharbia	2,294	43	1.9
Menoufia	1,771	36	2.0
Behera	2,517	36	1.5
Delta	15,510	236	1.5
Giza	2,419	93	3.8
Beni Suef	1,409	63	5.6
Fayoum	1,140	43	3.8
'Middle' Egypt	4,668	199	4.3
Minya	2,056	398	19.4
Assyout	1,695	339	20.0
Souhag	1,925	273	14.2
Kena	1,705	129	7.6
Aswan	620	34	5.5
Upper Egypt	8,001	1,173	14.7
Red Sea	56	2	4.6
New Valley	85	2	1.8
Matrouh	113	1	1.0
Sinai	10	>1	1.0
Desert	264	5	1.9
TOTAL	36,656	2,316	6.3

Source: 1976 Census

Thus the observations made on the previous map hold broadly true in this case. The Delta shows a reduction in the Christian proportion as one moves north from Cairo, with the urban governorates proving exceptions. Although Upper Egypt shows a greater proportion than Cairo there is still the distance-decay factor: south of Assyout and north of Minya are lower proportions than Cairo.

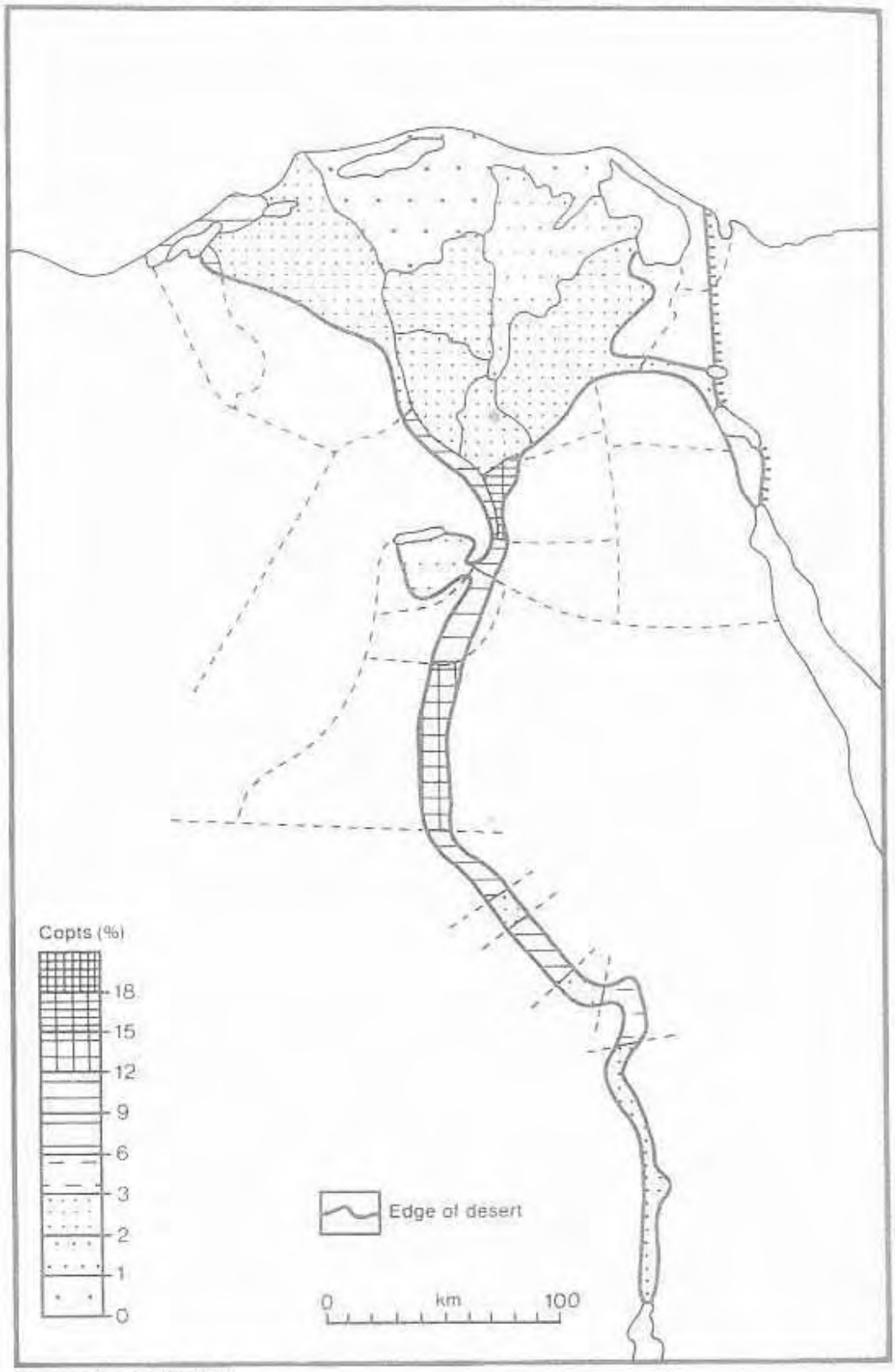
3.3. The Distribution According to Church Statistics

The map showing the percentage of the total number of Copts in each diocese (Fig 3.6) is an analogous map to that of Figure 3.2 but in this case based on church statistics. There are two anomalies which hinder comparison: the separation of the Abu Tig and Girga dioceses reduces the overall percentages of Christians in Assyout, Souhag and Kena, while the inclusion of the canal towns in Sharkia diocese increases the overall percentage in this diocese.

The immediate impression given by a comparison of the two maps is that the church data show a similar overall distribution but with less heavy concentrations in the heartlands defined earlier. Conversely, therefore, some other areas show significantly higher values than in the census data. These show where the church believes the census has grossly underestimated. Table 3.3 summarises these results.

At the outset it must be noted that these figures do not suggest that the census gives larger totals of Christians in one governorate, only the relative importance of each governorate in each set of figures. The most obvious feature in the Table is the gain of Beni Suef and Giza at the expense of Minya and Cairo. More subtle is the greater weighting given to Alexandria (which conflicts with the trend in successive censuses that the proportions of Christians in Alexandria's population has fallen precipitously, as discussed in Chapter 2). There is only a small drop in the combined percentages for Assyout, Souhag, Kena and Aswan compared with a large drop for Minya alone. Finally, the difference of almost 1 per cent for Gharbia makes it unique among the non-urban Delta governorates; it is the more noteworthy because the church gives it less weight than the government,

3.6 The Percentage of Copts in each Diocese



Source : N.K. David et al

Table 3.3: Differences between church and census estimates of percentage of the total Christian population in in each governorate

(a negative sign means that the census has a higher percentage)

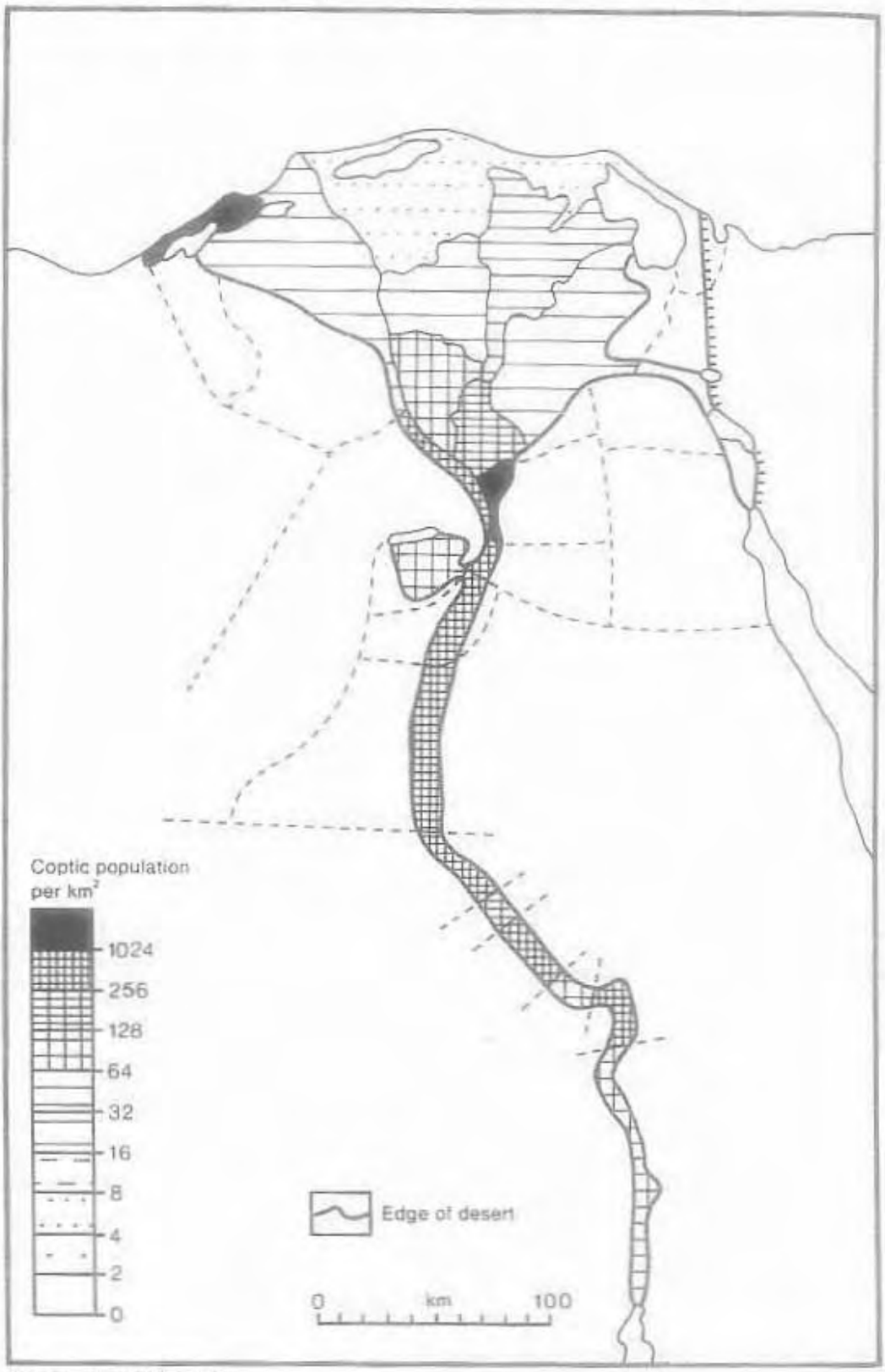
Minya	-5.1
Cairo	-4.9
Assyout-Aswan inclusive	-1.7
Canal towns and Sharkia	-1.2
Gharbia	-0.9
Damietta & Kafr el Sheikh	-0.2
Fayoum	+0.2
Behera	+0.3
Menoufia	+0.6
Kalyubia	+0.6
Dakahlia	+0.8
Alexandria	+1.8
Beni Suef	+4.2
Giza	+6.3

going against the general trend for the rest of the Delta.

It must be noted at this point that part of the solution for some of the differences may lie in the nature of the statistics - Minya and Cairo have many non-Coptic Orthodox Christians. The nineteenth- and twentieth-century Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries found it easier to proselytise Copts than Muslims, and most converted in the Coptic strongholds. The church data relate only to the Coptic Orthodox, the census to all Christians. However, it needs to be reiterated that the Coptic Orthodox still make up 94 per cent of all Christians; moreover Alexandria is also a city with many non-Coptic churches, yet the census estimates nearly two per cent less than the church. Clearly there must be other factors involved.

The map of the density of the Coptic population according to church statistics (Fig 3.7) corresponds to Figure 3.3 using census data. The most striking difference between the two maps is the greater overall density portrayed by the church figures, with their much higher estimates of the total number of Copts.

3.7 The Density of Coptic Population in each Diocese



Source : N.K. David et al

Overall, the density is more than twice as great, although the difference is not spatially uniform. There are similarities at the extremes: Cairo and Alexandria dominate, and Kafr el Sheikh and Damietta are the lowest, with at least a class order separating them from the bulk of the dioceses. However, study of the church data in Figure 3.4 also shows noticeable differences. The church statistics portray rather more of a continuum of dioceses on a logarithmic scale, compared with the clustering of governorates in the census data. In addition, the tendency in the census data for each class to contain a similar number of members is not repeated in the church data. In consequence the overall pattern is not as simple as that of the census data. Abu Tig and Girga show variation within the Upper Egyptian heartland, but of greater consequence is the enhancement of areas that are adjacent to, or even separate from, the heartland regions. If the rank order of the church data is compared with that of the census in Figure 3.4, Giza, Kena and Beni Suef have risen at the expense of Minya and Assyout, while, in the Delta, Kalyubia, Menoufia and, most surprisingly of all, the northern governorate of Dakahlia have all risen in the order. This trend can be further illustrated by calculating the multiple by which the church data are greater than the census data for each area (Table 3.4).

This highlights the church claim that the Delta Christian population has been grossly underestimated, with Dakahlia, Menoufia, Kalyubia and Behera all high in the table. Only Gharbia shows an important reversal of this trend. Secondly, the Upper Egyptian Coptic heartland of the census has been effectively extended down the Nile valley to include Beni Suef and Giza. The church has not made such extravagant claims for the accepted heartland of Souhag, Assyout, Minya and Cairo.

The disparities shown in Table 3.4 cast further doubt on the church statistics. The argument of under-enumeration in the Delta might have some force if taken in isolation, but the method of data-collection for all the statistics must be questioned when Beni Suef and Giza are studied. It is difficult to see how such a large number of Christians could be 'lost' in the governorates by the census, especially as one is largely rural and the other largely urban. The result would suggest that 36 per cent of the

Table 3.4: The multiple by which church estimates of Christian population density are greater than census estimates in each governorate

Giza	6.5
Beni Suef	6.4
Dakahlia	3.9
Menoufia	8.5
Kalyubia	3.2
Alexandria	3.2
Behera	3.1
Fayoum	2.8
Kena/Aswan*	2.5-3.0
(Average	2.5)
Souhag*	2.0-2.7
Assyout*	2.0-2.3
Damietta & Kafr el Sheikh	2.0
Cairo	1.9
Minya	1.8
Sharkia	1.5
Gharbia	1.4

*Maximum and minimum due to boundary differences

population of Beni Suef were Christian, and 25 per cent of the population of Giza. In these extreme cases, at the very least, there must be a suspicion of optimistic speculation. As there is such a doubt over the church statistics there will be little attempt to try to explain the rationale behind them; rather the following section will concentrate on the census figures.

3.4. An Historical Perspective on the Spatial Distribution of the Copts

The history of Egypt since the Arab invasion in the seventh century does much to explain the present distribution and proportion of Copts in Egypt. The following section will ignore recent demographic trends (which have been discussed in Chapter One) and will only refer to the urbanising tendency of the Copts

in a cursory fasion, as this will be considered in Chapter Four. This last omission inevitably excludes many social and economic factors, which will also be considered later. The main thrust of the argument will therefore concentrate on political factors, which nevertheless will involve some socio-economic policies of both Copts and government over time.

The use of an historical approach imposes its own problems. It cannot be doubted that the main elements of the distribution of the Coptic population were established by the Middle Ages, yet at this distance from the actual events it is impossible to distinguish the most important causes. It is not even certain when Egypt attained an overall Muslim majority; between the eighth and tenth centuries seems a plausible estimate[8]. One can only propose possible factors and leave the significance of each open to speculation. Since the principal dichotomy is between Lower and Upper Egypt (the former with a low concentration of Copts, the latter with a high concentration), these two areas will be considered separately, assessing reasons for the reduction of Christians in the first, and their concentration in the second.

3.5. Lower Egypt

A.J. Butler, in his classic account of the Arab conquest, has said:

> few things are stranger in history than the absolute absorption of the one part of the Copts and the stubborn refusal of the other part to renounce their ancestral customs and their religion[9].

There were two processes at work in the absorption of the Copts, especially prevalent in the Delta, which must be clearly separated. One was Arabisation, in which the Arabic language in particular, but also elements of Arab culture, came to dominate the country. This was only one of many mechanisms which contributed towards the process most relevant to this study, Islamicisation. Others included conversion, migration and inter-marriage.

At first there was no reason for Christianity to lose ground to Islam. Immediately before the Arab invasion, the Coptic Orthodox Church had been tragically persecuted by the Melkite (Greek) Patriarch Cyrus, who was the tool of the governing Byzantine Empire. The Coptic Patriarch was forced to go into hiding, and the church seemed powerless. As a result, the Copts did not hinder the Arab invasion of 640-642 AD[10] and in the Byzantine counter-invasion of 645-6 they willingly cooperated with the Arabs[11]. The initial terms set by the Muslim conquerors for Copts and Melkites alike did not disappoint the Copts. Christians were given reasonable ecclesiastical freedom (save for the ringing of bells and proselytisation), and were compelled to pay a special poll tax or jizya. It is likely that the total taxes under the first Arab governor were actually less than the Byzantine taxes for the majority of the population[12], although they rose rapidly under succeeding governors.

From 650 to 750 AD there was a series of oppressive Arab governors who attempted to 'milk' the Egyptian cow by taxation. This was not intended to be direct religious oppression but, since the Christians were liable for the jizya, it had that effect. Nevertheless, there is little reason to suppose this led to widespread conversions[13]. Nor is there any reason to believe that the heavy taxation was spatially discriminatory. The richest agricultural areas in Egypt at this time included much of Upper Egypt, as the northern Delta was liable to annual inundation for long periods, making habitation and the growing of high quality produce difficult. Thus, in order to maintain the revenues achieved by the Byzantines, the Arabs knew they must maintain a firm administration over the whole country, not just around the military centres of Fustat and Alexandria. As a result, they simply took over the Byzantine system, using Christian pagarchs to administer and control tax collection[14].
There was no 'remoter' area of Egypt that escaped these early taxations and might therefore have become the beginnings of a Coptic stronghold.

The increase in oppression is, however, the root cause of further coversions of Christians in the Delta. In the Delta generally, and in particular in the region known as Hawf (between Damietta and Bilbeis) the reaction to increased taxation was

armed resistance. Between 722 and 767 there were three uprisings of Copts in the Delta, and there were other occasions when they supported rivals of the governor. In 767 they twice defeated the governor's troops and much of the north-east Delta was in open insurrection for several years[15]. As a result, when order was restored, punishment was severe. The final major revolt was in 829 in the Hawf, when the Caliph himself finally came to put down the rebellion. The ruthlessness with which he did so has been said to mark the beginning of major apostasy by the Copts[16]. Villages were burned and men, women and children taken to be sold as slaves in Damascus and Baghdad[17]. In contrast, the south suffered one major insurrection, beginning in 782, which was also eventually put down in a ruthless fashion. It seems probable that the concentration of military authority in the Delta was an important reason for conversions and migration. Why there was greater unrest in these areas is not so plain. The area had had a reputation for ignoring authority in Byzantine times; Arab tribes had been brought in to help stabilise the region, but had only formed another faction; it is possible that, as a poorer area, it was less able to cope with the increasing tax demands. All of these factors may have contributed to the violence in the Delta in the eighth and ninth centuries.

A second reason for a lower concentration of Copts in the Delta region was the immigration of Arabs to Egypt. In about 732, five thousand Arabs of one tribe were deliberately imported into the Hawf region, and other tribes were brought into the same area later[18]. This area had more livestock rearing than Upper Egypt and was thus more attractive to the nomadic Arab herdsmen than the almost exclusively sedentary agriculture further south. Military personnel further swelled the numbers of Muslims. Between 641 and 750, each of the ninety-two governors who ruled Egypt brought with them an Arab army estimated at five thousand[19]. Many of these eventually settled in Egypt. It is likely that most settled in the north, near to the largest military encampments (especially at Fustat). More important than their numbers was the effect they had on the surrounding population. First of all, they would have been models of the preferential treatment, in terms of tax exemptions and government positions, given to Muslims. Secondly, as most of them were men

who, if they settled, of necessity married Christian women, the impact of their numbers was effectively doubled. By law, no Christian man could marry a Muslim woman, but Muslim men could marry Christian women, with the children of the marriage legally compelled to be brought up as Muslims. Thus any mixing that did take place inevitably led to a reduction in the Coptic proportion.

It is probable that, after this point, the process reinforced itself[20]. Once the Copts were in a minority in the Delta (probably in the eighth century)[21] not only did the insecurity of being a minority encourage apostasy, but the areas in which the minority was smaller were liable to greater losses (by migration as well as conversion). Violent persecution of Christians was sporadic but always feared. In contrast, the social pressure to convert was unremitting. High taxation was only one factor. Relations between dhimmis (the minority religious groups) and Muslims were strongly discouraged. Dhimmis could not exercise any authority over a Muslim (including holding a high political position), could not serve in the army or carry arms, and were compelled on different occasions to wear distinctive clothing to differentiate them from Muslims[22]. The enforcement of these prohibitions varied, however. Many legal disadvantages could be overcome in the oriental world by personal bonds[23]. It is commonplace to hear of Christians entering into partnerships with Muslims and reaching high governmental administrative positions owing to their skill in this area. The earliest Arab settlers were military personnel from a nomadic background, who were not interested in administrative jobs but were very keen to continue the collection of taxes. Hence the Copts gained a virtual monopoly in financial affairs, which they did not lose until modern times. Despite these caveats, it was always understood by the Copts that, financially and socially, they had everything to gain by conversion. The periodic outbursts of violent persecution were also an inducement to conversion, both in this period and at the time of the Crusades. One commentator notes that, at one time, the flow of conversions to Islam was so great that the Muslim governors discouraged it in order to protect state revenue[24]. In areas where the Copts were already a minority, mob persecution would have been easier to

accomplish, and this is one mechanism by which the Coptic heartland could have shrunk to the south away from Fustat.

Fourthly, Lower Egypt was generally the region that suffered most calamities under the Fatimids, Ayyubids and Mamluks (969-1517 AD). In this long period of time there were many famines, internal revolts and attacks from outside. Of these, the famines and internal revolts affected the whole of Egypt; the famines as they were caused by a series of low Nile floods, and the revolts as they were usually started by rebellious imported troops who roamed the country. Any tendency for the Cairo area to suffer more from uncontrolled mercenaries has to be weighed against the fact that they were driven south as quickly as possible by other troops wanting to control the capital. The essential difference between Upper and Lower Egypt was the latter's exposed position to outside attack. Attacks on Egypt from the south were few and short in duration, coming solely from Nubia. In the north, however, there were attacks by different armies of Crusaders in Egypt in 1117, 1163, 1164, 1168-9, 1218-21 and 1249-50 AD, and, in addition, coastal raids were fairly commonplace. The main targets for attack were the ports (especially Alexandria and Damietta), Cairo itself and towns on the Cairo-Palestine road. In these exchanges the Copts got the worst of all worlds. They were not recognised as Christians by the Crusaders and therefore given an element of protection (as was true in Nubian attacks in the south), but they were identified with the Crusaders as Christians by the Muslim Egyptians. As a result, they were attacked by the Crusaders and then treated with the utmost suspicion by the Muslims. Popular and governmental fear of the Crusaders was such that persecution often broke out against the Copts in the Delta at this time[25].

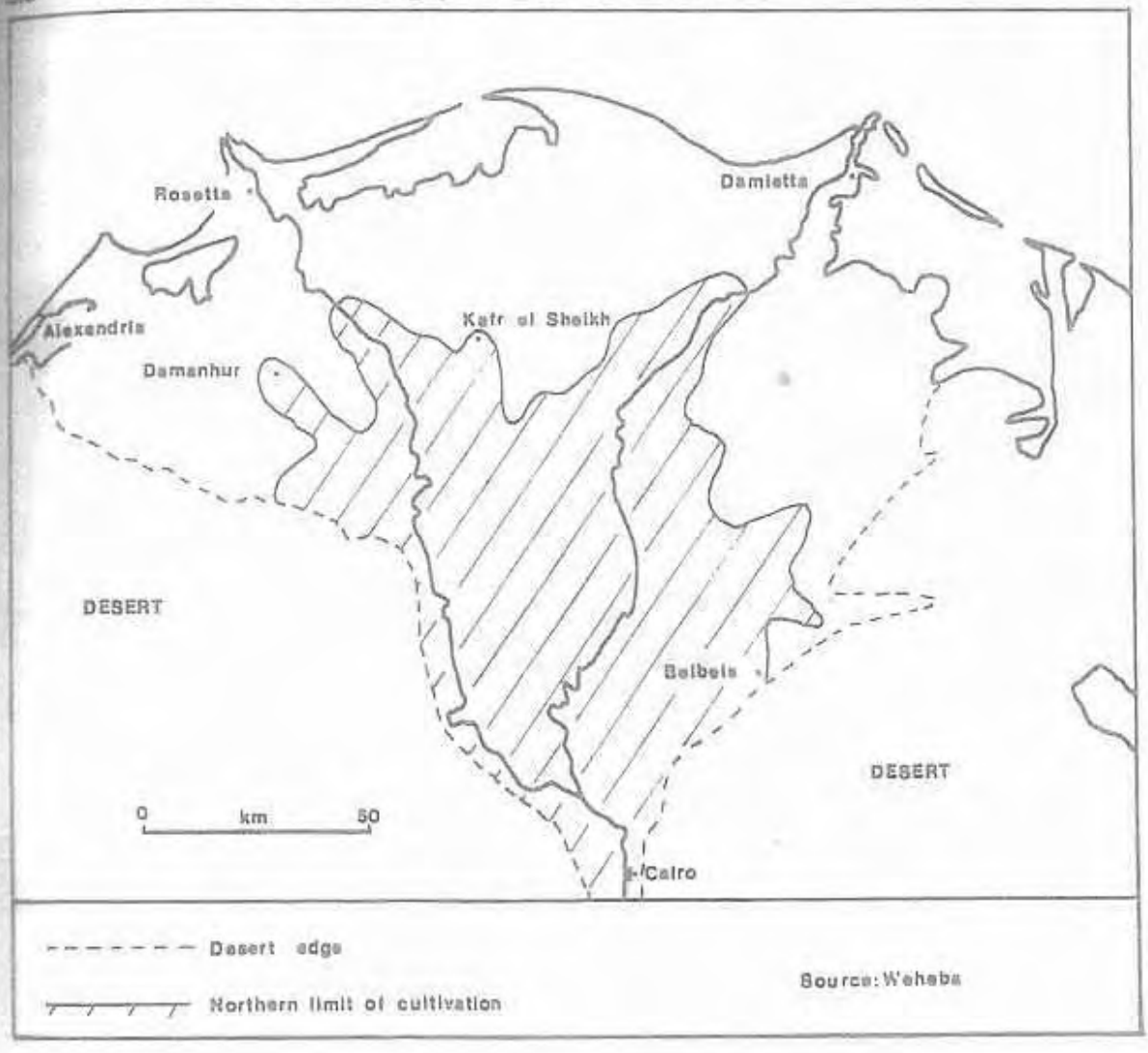
Fifthly, population increase in the Delta in modern times has favoured Muslims rather than Copts. The Delta experienced a population growth in Roman and Byzantine times as the flood inundations were better controlled[26]. This was in contrast to the rest of Egypt, where a decrease in population was caused by 'managerial incompetence, religious strife and civil war, epidemics and devastations from Arabian bedouin'[27]. Butzer estimates that, by 150 BC, the population of the Delta was approaching that of Upper Egypt, and the Ptolemaic period saw the

demographic and political centre of gravity shift permanently to Lower Egypt[28]. Nevertheless, in time, the marginal areas of agriculture began to go out of cultivation even in the Delta, owing to the factors mentioned above. From the fourth to the fifteenth century, more of the Delta fringe was abandoned, as saltwater incursions and high floods made the land increasingly difficult to work (Fig 3.8). Not until the nineteenth century was the irrigated land used in Roman times repopulated and used again for agriculture[29]. Then the new canals dug under Muhammed Ali resulted in new lands becoming available from 1826. These were given to local fellahin and to bedouin[30]. The bedouin were wholly Muslim and the rural farmers by this time also almost exclusively Muslim. It is unlikely that any Copts in this area would readily have moved from the mutual protection of other Copts in their villages. This mechanism helps us to understand the extremely low proportion of Copts in the northern Delta today. It may also help to explain the relatively low percentage of Copts in Fayoum, as this too was an area where land was reclaimed in the nineteenth century.

3.6 Upper Egypt

The penetration of Islam into Upper Egypt took place at a slower rate. Following the nationwide persecutions of the Copts in 1354, the Muslims are thought to have finally reached a majority even in the Coptic stronghold of the south (although the exact date and precise proportions will never be known with any certainty)[31]. Some of the reasons for this were the same as for the conversion of the Delta, but it still needs to be explained how the Copts could remain in a majority in the South for up to seven hundred years, probably five hundred years longer than in the north. This is even more impressive when one considers the nature of the country. Minya and Souhag are not mountain strongholds like Mount Lebanon and Kurdistan, easily defensible against invaders and alien settlers. The southern Nile valley is easily reached by water or by foot, and no military defence was possible against a numerically superior force. Administratively, the Arabs could control Upper Egypt as easily as parts of the Delta (as the many revolts there show). Furthermore, the south was

3.8 Cultivation in Lower Egypt around 1800 AD.

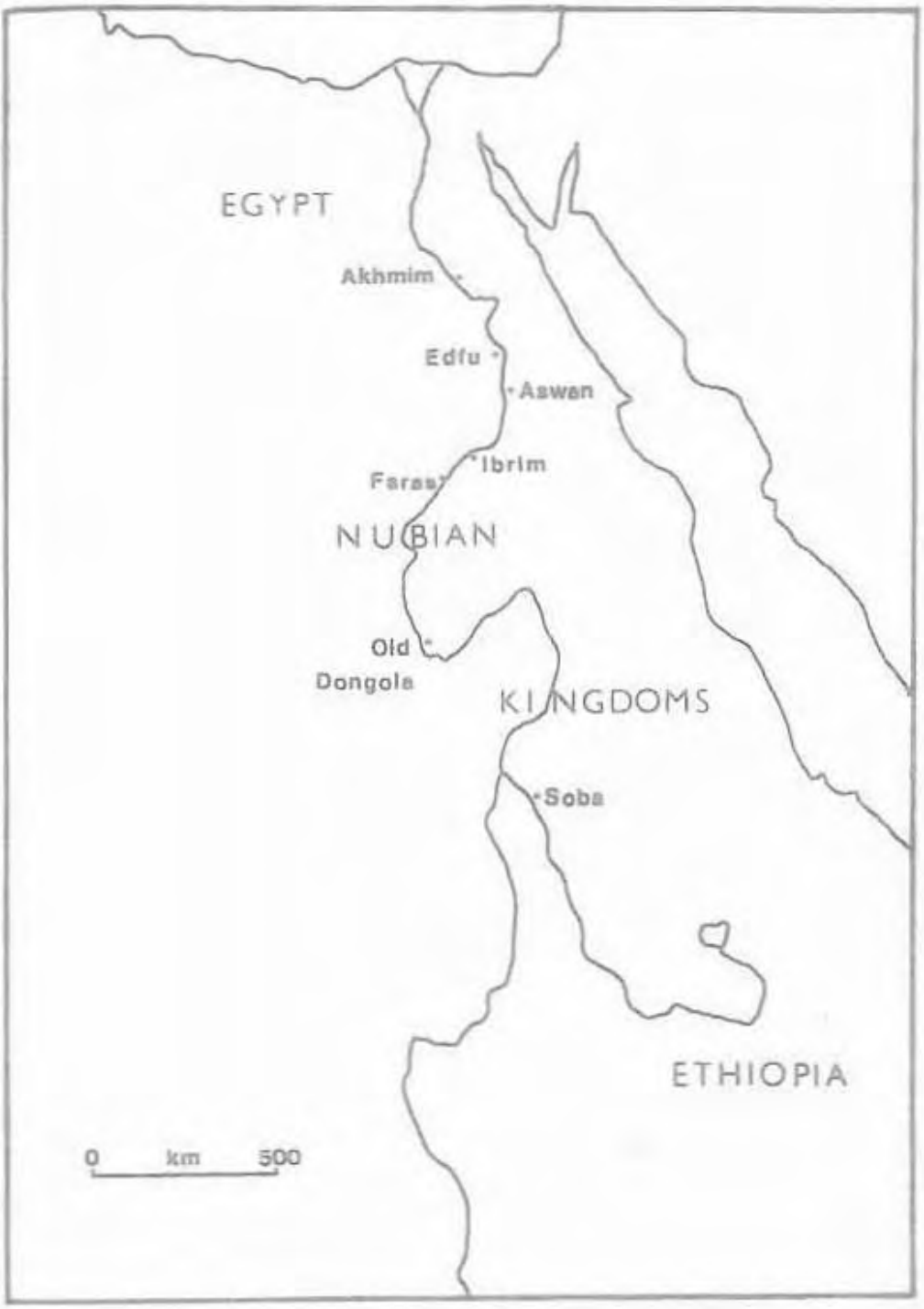


still constantly vulnerable to attacks from desert bedouin. Although open proselytisation by the government was rare, there were constant political, social and financial pressures on the Copts to convert. However, certainly the political and social pressures, and possibly the financial pressures, were not as great as further north (for reasons that will be explained), and herein lay the reasons for the survival of a contemporary Coptic stronghold.

First, the establishment of a large Coptic community was in itself self-perpetuating. Conversion to Islam was a one-way and usually irreversible process, which, through positive feedback, caused a rapid decline in Coptic proportions in the Delta. Moreover, northern Copts could migrate to the administrative capital of Fustat (later Cairo) and to Alexandria, relying on their administrative and financial skills. This option was not as readily open to the Copts in the south, so that self-reliance became more important. This is reflected in the fierce identification with religion exhibited by rural Saidians today, in contrast to the more moderate north Egyptians. With initial resistance to change, social barriers built up in the south impeded the diffusion of Islam. This was reinforced from two sources: Nubia and the monasteries.

The importance of Nubian kingdoms in the Middle Ages should not be underestimated. From the third century to the fourteenth century AD, three separate kingdoms (sometimes uniting to form two or one) existed along the Nile between Aswan and Ethiopia (Fig 3.9). Although influenced by Byzantine culture, the three countries were converted to Monophysite (Coptic) Christianity before the Arab invasion of Egypt. Although Arab raids between 641 and 652 penetrated as far as Old Dongola (and forced the Nubians to pay a regular tribute of slaves), this consolidated rather than diminished a spirit of Nubian independence. Links between the Christians in Nubia and those in Egypt were strong. The Patriarch of Alexandria had the right to appoint the metropolitan of the Nubian kingdoms[32], and Egyptian monks used to live in Nubian monasteries. Of greatest significance however was the military power of Nubia, which lent support to the southern Egyptian Christians which was denied to those in the north in the vital first centuries of Islamic government. The History of the

3.9 The Nile Kingdoms in the Middle Ages



Patriarchs records that the powerful King Cyriacus of Nubia made a foray into Egypt as far as Cairo in 745, in order to force the Amir to release the recently-arrested Coptic patriarch[33] (although it is possible that this report deliberately put the two event together for propaganda purposes). For long periods of time, Nubia was strong enough to reduce, or even to halt altogether, the tribute of slaves to Egypt, and in the tenth century the weakness of Egyptian military power allowed a large-scale attack from Nubia. In 967, Akhmim was reached and the Nubians retained control of the country as far north as Edfu for some years[34]. A sympathetic government in such close proximity must have reduced the social pressure on the Copts. The decline of Nubia began in 1173, with the attack by Salah al-Din's brother, Shams al-Dawla, on Ibrim and the temporary establishment of a garrison there. Internal decline, Muslim raids from the north and negro attack from the south as well as the slow influx of Muslim migrants from the north, completed the process over the next three centuries. This footnote on the decline of Nubia may begin to explain the lower percentage of Christians in the far south of the country today. The establishment of Egyptian control between Aswan and Ibrim during the Nubian decline is likely to have put pressure on the Copts. In addition, this control was interrupted in 1324 by Kenz al-Dawla, of the Kenz tribe in southern Egypt, who became the first Muslim ruler of Nubia. Kenz attacks on Aswan between 1366 and 1403, when for a time they controlled it, may have led to a depopulation of Christians, including migration to the north.

It is worth noting that, at this time, Ethiopia could also influence affairs in Egypt, although in a less direct manner than the Nubians. The Patriarch of Alexandria appointed the Ethiopian Patriarch, from whom the King of Ethiopia derived his royal authority[35]. After the decline of Nubia, the Mamluk rulers of Egypt were particularly anxious to keep the Coptic patriarch isolated from Ethiopia. During times of persecution of the Copts, strong Ethiopian monarchs threatened to divert the course of the Blue Nile, enlisted the support of Europeans and, more practically, harassed Muslim merchants in Ethiopia and the Muslim Sultanates in Eastern Ethiopia. Muslim attempts to keep the Copts isolated are therefore understandable and show that, even

at this late period, the Muslims feared a Christian resurgence in Egypt.

The second source of support for the Copts was internal: the monasteries. Meinardus maps ruined and inhabited monasteries in Egypt today[36]. There are thirteen north of Cairo, of which five are in the desert, five near Alexandria, two more near Rosetta and Cairo, and only one, near Bilqas, which is not on the fringes of or outside the Delta. Thus the majority of the population did not have ready recourse to a monastery. South of Cairo however, 64 monasteries are recorded, all within one kilometre of the cultivated area and many on the banks of the Nile. Six of these are in Fayoum, nineteen between Cairo and Souhag and thirty-nine between Souhag and Aswan. The widespread existence of monasteries in Upper Egypt gave a sense of permanence to the practising Copts, and also offered a place of refuge when the population was persecuted[37]. Many monasteries had high walls, originally built to repel bedouin attacks.

Finally, the environment may have been a factor supporting the survival of the Copts in the south. It is unlikely that Upper Egypt was less desirable environmentally than Lower Egypt; indeed the reverse is probably true, as the Delta was a swampier region and it is possible that malaria was endemic there. However, early Arab settlers were not interested in sedentary or urban lifestyles, and preferred to settle in the under-utilized Delta, although some tribes did settle in the south (e.g. the Kenz tribe mentioned earlier). This left a rich agricultural area in the hands of the Christians. The south was superior for the growth of wheat, beans, flax, sugar cane, indigo and cotton, although rice was a better crop in the Delta[38]. Over the centuries this agricultural richness may have given the hard-pressed fellahin a slightly greater ability to pay taxes in Upper Egypt, and so reduced the financial pressure for conversion.

3.7 Summary

Many of the features of the distribution of the Copts analysed earlier in this chapter, using the census data, can only be understood by reference to history. The relative importance of each historical factor is difficult to determine so long after

the event. After the Arab invasion, sporadic persecution and isolation from other Christian churches lay at the root of the drift to Islam. The process was faster in the Delta owing to the persecution of Christians after their rebellions, the greater influx of Arab tribes, further exacerbated persecution in the Crusader period, and rural repopulation in the northern Delta by Muslims in the nineteenth century. In contrast, Upper Egypt had moral and physical support from Nubia and the monasteries, and perhaps had a greater ability to pay the poll tax. The fact that conversion was a one-way process accelerated the spread of Islam where the pressure was greatest, in the Delta. The very low numbers of Copts in the rural north of the Delta, and the comparatively low numbers in Fayoum, may be linked to reclamation there since the nineteenth century, while the lower numbers in the far south around Aswan may be connected with its postition as a border town. Some other contemporary factors relating to the reduction of the Copts' proportion were discussed in Chapter 2 and a discussion of the urban nature of the Copts will follow.

NOTES

1. C.A.P.M.A.S., 1976a
2. David et al, 1982
3. Barrett, 1983
4. C.A.P.M.A.S., 1976a
5. David et al, 1982
6. State Information Service, 1977. Inhabited area figures are for 1976
7. Betts, 1975, 215
8. Staffa, 1977, 37
9. Butler, 1978, 491
10. Butler, 1978, 439
11. Butler, 1978, 480
12. Butler, 1978, 453
13. Vatikiotis, 1976, 15
14. Staffa, 1977, 19
15. Lane-Poole, 1901, 33
16. Lane-Poole, 1901, 38
17. Staffa, 1977, 31

18. Vatikiotis, 1976, 15; Lane-Poole, 1901, 29
19. Vatikiotis, 1976, 15
20. Jomier, 1977, 72
21. Frend, 1969, 265
22. Masriya, 1976, 87
23. Staffa, 1977, 65
24. Atiya, 1968, 83
25. Lane-Poole, 1901, 190-241
26. Butzer, 1976, 92
27. Butzer, 1976, 82
28. Butzer, 1976, 95
29. Weheba, 1960, 225
30. Al-Sayyid-Marsot, 1982, 153-74
31. Bosworth, 1972, 65; Frend, 1969, 277
32. Frend, 1969, 262
33. as quoted in Frend, 1969, 264
34. Frend, 1969, 269
35. Bosworth, 1972, 204
36. Meinardus, 1965, Chs 15, 19, 20
37. Butler, 1978, 461; Staffa, 1977, 21
38. Weheba, 1960, 228-31

4 THE URBANISM OF THE COPTS

4.1. Introduction

A characteristic common to the Copts is a greater tendency to reside in urban areas than that displayed by the Muslims. Table 4.1 shows that, in all the governorates of Egypt, the Copts are more urbanised than the Muslims. Excluding the rural Coptic heartland of Minya, Assyout, Souhag and Kena, and with the one other exception of Menoufia, in every governorate over 50 per cent of the Coptic population live in towns. On average 59.2 per cent of them do so. In contrast, the Muslim population is predominantly rural, apart from the urban governorates of Cairo, Alexandria, Port Said, Suez and Sinai. In only two other governorates (Giza and the Red Sea) do more than 50 per cent of the Muslims live in towns. In many governorates the percentage is under 30 and the average of 42.8 per cent (sixteen per cent less than the Copts) is due to Cairo's massive population.

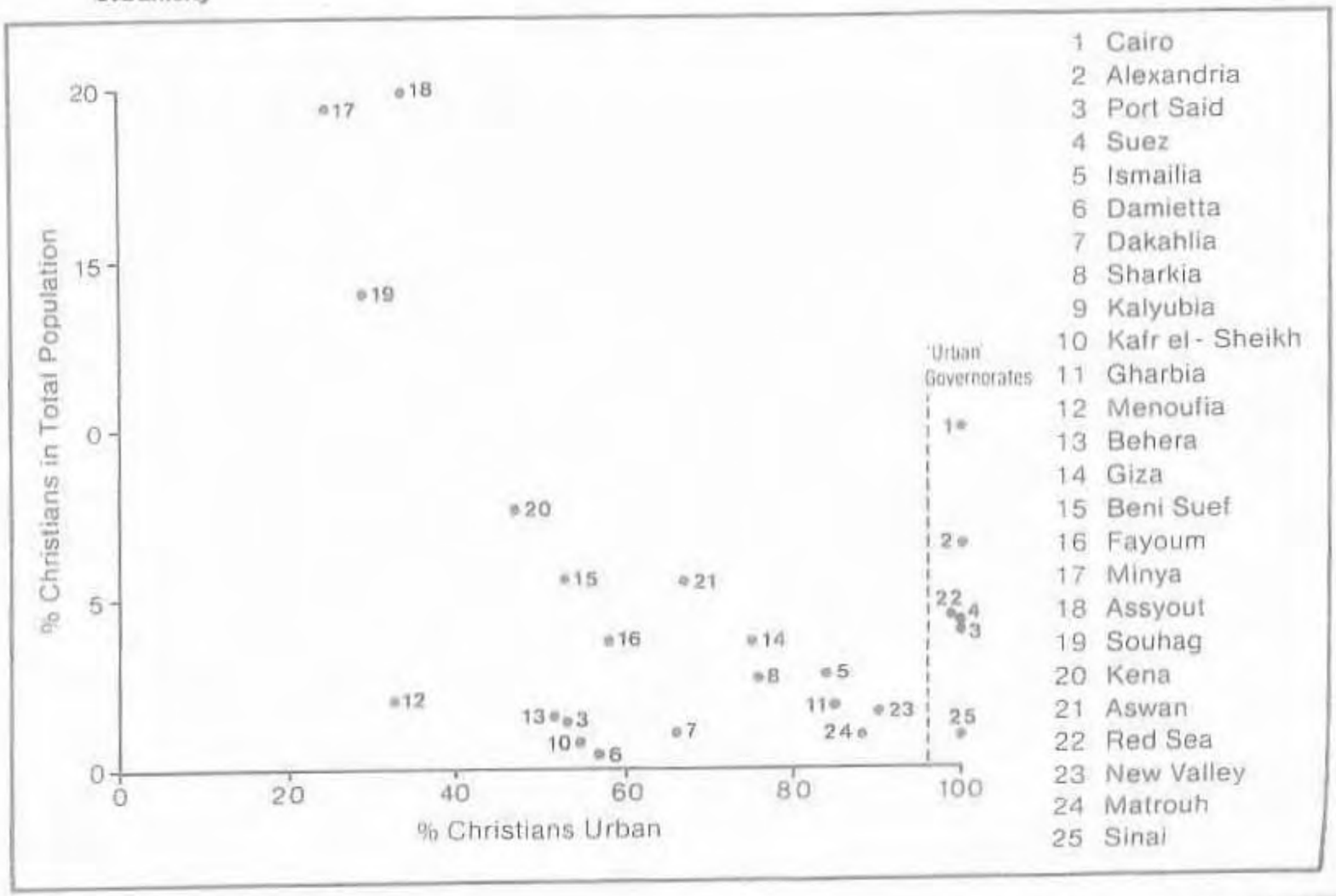
The inordinate growth of Cairo in the past three decades has masked the depth of this particular Muslim-Christian cleavage. Figure 2.1 shows how the Christian proportion of the Cairene population has dropped over this century and, although there were many reasons for this (see Chapter 2), one recent phenomenon is peculiar to Cairo and Alexandria. Rural-urban migration has involved both Copts and Muslims but, since the proportion of Copts in these two cities was greater than the average for the rest of the (largely rural) country, the net effect has been to reduce the proportion of Christians in Cairo and Alexandria (although not the total number)[1]. Thus modern mass migration has reduced the gap between the proportions of Copts and Muslims living in urban areas, but the Copts have a greater tendency to have an urbanised life-style than these recent figures suggest.

There is thus a long-standing Coptic inclination for the urban life that must be explained. As with the overall distribution of Copts discussed in Chapter 3, the causes of this characteristic reach back to the days of the initial conquest of Egypt by the Arabs. Before this time, the vast majority of Egyptians were Christian in both rural and urban areas. The origin of the Coptic urban minority is unusual, as it is the

product of the gradual conversion of the population to Islam. More commonly, the significant religious urban minorities in the pre-industrial Middle East originated from conversion (as with the early Christian groups in the second and third centuries AD in the Near East), or from migration (as with the Jews throughout the Middle East)[2]. In both these cases, there was an added reason for the base of the minorities to be the city. The city was the node of communication. In the case of either migration or evangelism, the city was the first place to receive the migrants, or the first place for the preacher to evangelise. Diffusion of people or messages was from city to city but, if the minority failed to become a majority, often travelled no further. Only mountain strongholds could provide as great security as the city for such a minority. The situation was different, however, for an old ruling order that gradually declined into a minority. It was seen as a threat to the new ruling order, and was increasingly relegated to rural areas. The city was controlled by the new faith and its administrators, and so the ancient worshippers of Egyptian gods in Byzantine Egypt, the Jacobites in Syria in the Middle Ages, and the Nestorians in Mesopotamia after the conquest of Tamerlane were all forced out to rural areas[3].

Why did this not happen to the Copts? There are probably three reasons: the tenacity of the Copts, the nature of Islam and the heritage of the Arab conquerors. After long persecution by the Romans and then the Byzantines, the Copts had sanctified suffering (the memory of martyrs of the pre-Arab era is to this day a vital strand of Coptic life), and had developed a self-sufficient mentality. Many were sure in their faith and they did not convert to Islam easily, thus giving them time to adapt and find security in an Islamic state. The very nature of Islam encouraged this. The dhimmis were tolerated sufficiently to ensure their survival, assuming there was internal stability within the sect. It is interesting to compare the experience of other North African Christians and the Nestorians with that of the Copts. The former quickly embraced Islam because the Byzantines had virtually forced their conversion. The Nestorians, on the other hand, flourished in the cities of Mesopotamia because they were vigorous in their opposition to the Byzantines and allied themselves with the Arabs. It was their

4.1 **Christian Proportion in each Governorate against Christian Urbanicity**



conquest by the Shi'i Tamerlane, enemy of both Arabs and Nestorians, that forced the Nestorians from the cities. The urbanism of the Copts was developed to a higher degree than that of any other conquered Christian group because they took full advantage of their position vis-a-vis their Arab conquerors, who were not men of the city but men of the desert. Despite the importance of Mecca and Medina to Islam, the nomadic soldiers of the Islamic conquest were desert people and wanted no part of city life. Thus they encouraged Christians to maintain control of the day-to-day administration of the country. The Copts were indispensable for smooth government down to the twentieth century. Security could thus be found in the urban activities in which the Muslims were originally unwilling to participate. It could also be found with members of the same sect in a 'quarter' of the city, as any threat to the minority was not (usually) from a government bent on the sect's extinction, but rather from the general populace intermittently looking for scapegoats. In these circumstances, greater security lay in the support offered by the Coptic quarter of a large city, like Alexandria or Fustat, than in a small minority in a village easily attacked by a mob.

4.2 Variations in the Urban Proportions of the Copts

Table 4.1 shows that there is a large variation between governorates in the proportion of Christians living in urban areas, which ranges from 100 per cent to 25 per cent. While the Christian proportion is always higher than the Muslim, the gap between the two varies. For example, Kafr el Sheikh and Souhag have an almost identical proportion of urban Muslims (just over 20 per cent), but the Christian proportions are 55 per cent and 29 per cent respectively. It must therefore be asked whether there is an underlying factor which encourages a greater number of Christians to live in towns in some governorates. Another variable which may affect this is the percentage of Christians in the total population of each governorate. Figure 4.1 has been plotted to show if there is any relationship. If the wholly urban governorates are excluded (to the right of the graph), it does seem to show that the greater the percentage of Christians in the governorate, the less likely they are to be living in

Table 4.1: Christian and Muslim urban proportions by governorate

Governorate	Total Urban %	Christian %	Urban Rank (B)	Muslim %	Urban Rank (C)	Christians in Total population %	Rank (A)
Cairo	100	100	*	100	*	10.1	*
Alexandria	100	100	*	100	*	6.7	*
Port Said	100	100	*	100	*	4.2	*
Suez	100	100	*	100	*	4.3	*
Ismailia	49.2	84.0	4	48.2	2	2.8	9
Damietta	24.8	56.7	10	24.7	9	0.3	19
Dakahlia	24.0	65.6	8	23.5	11	1.1	16
Sharkia	20.2	53.0	13	19.8	18	1.4	15
Kalyubia	40.8	76.2	5	39.8	5	2.8	11
Kafr el Sheikh	20.7	55.1	11	20.5	15	0.7	18
Charbia	33.3	85.2	3	32.3	7	1.9	12
Menoufia	19.7	33.4	17	19.4	19	2.0	10
Behera	24.1	51.6	14	23.7	10	1.5	14
Giza	57.0	75.4	6	56.3	1	3.8	7
Beni Suef	24.9	53.0	12	23.2	12	5.6	5
Fayoum	24.1	57.5	9	22.8	13	3.8	8
Minya	21.0	25.8	19	19.8	17	19.4	2
Assyout	27.7	34.0	16	26.1	8	20.0	1
Souhag	21.3	29.1	18	20.1	16	14.2	3
Kena	22.9	47.2	15	21.0	14	7.6	4
Aswan	37.9	67.0	7	36.2	6	5.5	6
Red Sea	87.4	98.7	*	86.9	*	4.4	2
New Valley	40.8	89.9	1	39.9	4	1.8	13
Matrouh	46.0	88.3	2	45.5	3	1.0	17
Sinai	100	100	*	100	*	1.0	*
All Egypt	43.8	59.2		42.8		6.3	

Note: Columns A,B and C used in calculating Kendall's Correlation coefficient
Urban governorates (*) excluded from the rankings (see text)

Source: Census for all Egypt, 1976.

urban areas. It is therefore worth testing the two relationships statistically:

Null hypothesis 1. There is no relationship between the proportion of Christians in the total population of each governorate, and the proportion of Christians living in urban areas in each governorate.

Null hypothesis 2. There is no relationship between the proportion of Muslims and the proportion of Christians living in towns in each governorate.

As it will be useful to do a partial correlation test later, a suitable correlation test is Kendall's τ. This correlation coefficient is a distribution-free statistic which may be used with small samples and can be used in the calculation of a partial correlation coefficient[4].

Table 4.1 shows not only the relevant percentages but also their ranking. No rankings have been given to those governorates which are wholly urban (i.e. Cairo, Alexandria, Port Said, Suez and Sinai) nor to the Red Sea governorate (seven per cent urban and 99 per cent of Christians urban) as these are clearly anomalies for null hypothesis 1 (Figure 4.1) and misleading if included for null hypothesis 2 (as a perfect correlation must take place, partly due to the deliberate delineation of governorate boundaries). Discussion of this will take place later when the results are analysed.

The calculation of a partial correlation coefficient is especially useful as the effect of any correlation between Christian and Muslim urban proportions can be controlled. The results for these calculations were as shown in Table 4.2, including z-scores to test the significance of the correlation.

The results show that both null hypotheses are rejected at both the 0.95 and 0.99 levels of probability i.e. there is less than one chance in a hundred that the correlations occurred by chance, and therefore the correlations can be accepted as significant. The correlation between the proportions of Muslims and Christians that are urban (null hypothesis 2) was to be expected and is very strong: some governorates attract large

Table 4.2[5]: Results of correlation tests on nineteen governorates

(i.e. omitting the six urban governorates)

	τ	Z	Rejected at 0.95 level	0.99 level
Null hypothesis 1 (AB)	-0.392	2.344	✓	✓
Null hypothesis 2 (BC)	0.579	3.463	✓	
Partial correlation (ABc)	-0.413	-	not applicable	

numbers of both Christians and Muslims to the city, presumably due to better job prospects, earning potential, etc, even though the Christians have always been more urbanised than the Muslims. The negative correlation between the percentage of urban Christians and the percentage of Christians in the total population of each governorate (null hypothesis 1) is less strong than the previous result but still significant at the 0.99 level. Furthermore, the partial correlation, when the effect of the relative pull towards urbanisation (represented by the proportion of Muslims acting as a control group, who are living in urban areas) in each governorate is controlled, shows a small increase in correlation. This indicates that the rejection of null hypothesis 1 is based on a genuine correlation, not an apparent correlation in reality based on other non-sectarian pulls towards urbanisation. If this had been so, the partial correlation would have dropped considerably.

What then is the reason for the connection between the proportion of Christians in a governorate and the percentage of them found in urban areas? One possibility is that it is connected with the perception of their security. A low proportion of Christians in a governorate may cause (or especially may have caused) a drift to the city in search of security; conversely the vulnerability of the rural population to violent persecution may have led to the reduction of the total Christian proportion in the governorate (with most of the remainder in the cities). The direction of the initial causality is impossible to pinpoint, but once the process started (e.g. a drift to the cities due to a low proportion of Christians) this probably led to a reinforcing feedback (i.e. the remaining rural population became more vulnerable to persecution).

The exclusion of the urban governorates on deductive grounds (they do not fit an overall pattern in Figure 4.1) and on pragmatic grounds (the equal top rankings which would occur cause statistical problems) reduces understanding of the nature of the differences in sectarian urbanisation, especially because Cairo and Alexandria are among those omitted. Of the six governorates, Cairo and Alexandria are large metropolises, while the remaining four are agriculturally unproductive (mainly desert) with one or more cities, which are mainly ports. The other governorates

which are over 35 per cent urban show some of the same characteristics, but to a lesser extent. Ismailia, a port on the Suez canal like Port Said and Suez, nevertheless has a small agricultural hinterland; Giza and Kalyubia have a high urban percentage because Cairo has now extended beyond its governorate boundaries, although they still retain a rural population; the New Valley and Matrouh have a few oases, bedouin and monasteries to make up a small rural population, but are otherwise like the Red Sea and Sinai governorates; only Aswan is an industrial town with its rural population limited by the construction of the Nile valley in the far south. Therefore, if the correlation coefficients are recalculated without these governorates it should be possible to see the effect of the presence of those governorates with few local urban-rural links. With these excluded there are thirteen governorates remaining. The results were as shown in Table 4.3 and they make an interesting contrast with Table 4.2. The strengths of the two correlations have been reversed, such that only null hypothesis 1 can be rejected at the 0.99 level, although the correlation between Christian and Muslim urban proportions is still significant to the 0.95 level (i.e. there is only a 5 per cent chance that the correlation happened by accident).

This reversal is important. It suggests that, where there is a large rural population in the governorate, the percentage of Christians living in the cities is more closely related to the proportion of Christians living in the governorate as a whole than to the number of Muslims living in cities. If the previous interpretation is correct, this would mean that security is more important than the general non-sectarian attractions of urban life. If this is so, it reflects the situation prevalent in Egypt's pre-industrial past, when there were closer economic links between town and country, and therefore agrees with the historical evidence presented earlier in the chapter showing a continual Coptic inclination toward urban life. This underlying tendency was partly masked in Table 4.2, indicating that the modern forces of urban growth (through migration and a higher birth rate) have a greater importance in explaining Coptic urbanisation today in the major urban industrial and administrative centres, particularly Cairo and Alexandria.

Table 4.3 Results of correlation tests on 13 governorates (i.e. omitting those with over 35 per cent of the population urban)

	τ	z	Rejected at 0.95 level	0.99 level
Null hypothesis 1 (AB)	0.526	2.503	✓	✓
Null hypothesis 2 (BC)	0.410	1.951	✓	×
Partial correlation (ABc)	0.529	-	not applicable	

Nevertheless, the Copts' traditional roles in the city, the subject of the next section of the Chapter are still visible and indicate that, even in Cairo and Alexandria, there is a foundation of urbanised Copts who maybe contrasted with the newer urban-dwellers. An interesting topic of research would be to ascertain the role of this traditional Coptic segment of the population in assimilating the new Coptic migrants who often settle near them in Cairo.

4.3 Coptic Urban Economic Roles

The economic roles assumed by the Copts as they became a minority after the Arab invasion were highly specific and often amounted to a monopoly. This was reinforced in the Middle Ages by the guilds, which only occasionally contained more than one sect. In modern times, however, this clear-cut economic separation has been reduced with the decline of the guilds, the introduction of automated processes and the changes in administration and education after Nasser came to power. There are no systematic government statistics published today relating to occupation and religion, so that the following analysis has had to be based on reports and impressions. Four sets of economic roles will be discussed based on these functions, and also on the reasons often given for the Copts taking up these occupations. Once again no explanation of the economic areas in which the Copts specialise can be attempted without recourse to history.

4.3.1 Administrative and financial occupations

The most well-known Coptic specialisation is in financial affairs. They have long been known as financiers, accountants, money-lenders, tax-collectors and general administrators. There is a web of reasons why the Copts monopolised these activities for at least twelve hundred years, but the initial reason was the reluctance of the Arabs to involve themselves in these activities at the beginning of their rule over Egypt in AD 642. They were an army of occupation, untrained in complex administration and therefore unable to take over easily such an ancient and highly organised civil service as that existing in Egypt[6]. Furthermore,

they regarded the only honourable profession as that of warrior and protector[7] and therefore had little desire to be involved in administration. With the conquest complete, some Byzantine officials remained, but many had fled. These posts were filled by Coptic Christians so that Christians remained in control and in time the Copts became the most numerous in such jobs[8]. The highly centralised nature of the bureaucracy, the prime function of which was the efficient collection of taxes, made it difficult for Muslims in later years to break into the lower ranks of tax-collectors and officials without Coptic help. The Copts in the administration served a handful of Muslim masters in each administrative district, but jealously guarded their monopoly of the knowledge of the financial bureaucracy. Throughout the Middle Ages, the influential Copts were alternately favoured and purged, but no government could do without them for long.

The reluctance of Muslims to become involved in private banking and money-lending has continued, since the Koranic injunctions against usury gave the Copts an advantage over devout Muslims - for example:

> They say 'Trade is like usury'. But God hath permitted trade and forbidden usury .. Those who repeat (this offence) are companions of the fire: they shall abide therein for ever. (verse 275 Sura 11 Baqara).

Verses like this help to explain why the Muslims soon became merchants after the invasion, but could not easily compete in money-lending. Indeed, one can see a parallel case in medieval Europe, where the Roman Catholic church forbade usury and the Jews became the money-lenders. In time the Jews and the Copts shared this role in Egypt.

Coupled with this initial opportunism by the Copts was the tenacity with which the Copts fought to keep their advantage. Muslim reluctance to become involved in government financial administration and general bureaucracy did not last long, especially when the Copts starting converting to Islam. However, Coptic government officials could withstand the financial and social pressures to convert more easily than their fellahin counterparts. They had greater resources with which to resist

the pressure and less to gain by conversion, since political and social advancement would not quickly be bestowed upon a converted Copt. It would take some generations after conversion before the stigma of a Coptic heritage would be forgotten and an individual trusted to take a high, decision-making office. In general, therefore, the Copts in administration tended not to convert and only passed their knowledge on to other Copts, retaining some political security for the sect and their monopoly over financial affairs.

The situation has changed during the present century. At the beginning of the century, the Copts still constituted 45 per cent of the Egyptian civil service (and 98 per cent of the tax collectors)[9]. The 1937 census, however, showed that only 9.1 per cent of all Egyptian civil service personnel were Copts[10]. This change started after the 1923 elections when a policy was adopted of allocating posts on the basis of the proportion of Copts to Muslims in the 1917 census (i.e. one to thirteen). A study by Berger[11] also gives an indication of the proportion of Copts in the civil service. Table 4.4 was based on a questionnaire sent to four ministries. Religion was not asked on the questionnaire, but was determined from the respondent's name. As we have seen in Chapter 2, this is not a foolproof method, but the author claims that only a few identifications were in any doubt.

Table 4.4 shows that, at this time, Copts made up a greater proportion than their national proportion in the two ministries, while in the other two it was close to their national proportion. Significantly, the finance ministry is highest, with nearly 16 per cent, but this hardly represents a domination of the ministry; it is a mere shadow of the former Coptic involvement. There is no reason to believe that the proportion of Copts has risen significantly since this time, with one writer claiming the Finance ministry still had 16 per cent Copts in 1974[12]. On the other hand, there are Christian complaints of Copts being overlooked for promotion owing to their religion, but these cannot easily be substantiated. It would appear that the former Coptic domination of clerical and financial positions lingers on rather more strongly outside the state sector. This is partly due to the high level of education which many Copts achieve (see below). However, these occupations 'behind a desk' are held in

Table 4.4 Survey of sectarian proportions in four ministries

(after Berger)

	Agriculture	Education	Finance	Municipal and Rural Affairs
	%	%	%	%
Muslims	92.3	93.8	84.1	84.6
Copts	7.7	6.2	15.9	15.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
(Cases)	(39)	(64)	(107)	(39)

equally high esteem by the Muslims and, in the face of this competition, the Copts can no longer monopolise these occupations, although they still make up a higher proportion than their national proportion.

4.3.2 Professional occupations

The growth of the professions in Egypt has provided an opportunity which many Copts have taken up. Ibrahim claims that in the first half of this century a high percentage of teachers, professors, doctors, chemists, bankers, merchants and industrial managers were Copts[13]. Although he suggests that Nasser's socialism had a detrimental effect on Coptic employment in the state sector, the Copts are still noted today for their involvement in medicine, pharmacy, engineering, accountancy, architecture and surveying. One estimate suggests that 80 per cent of all pharmacists are Copts and 30-40 per cent of all doctors[14]. Some of these professions have evolved from traditional occupations: accountancy from knowledge of financial matters, surveying from field surveying (to collect the land tax), and architecture from building. Nevertheless, the reason why the Copts have gained an advantage in these fields is superior education.

This was initially made possible by a combination of access to better schools, better financial support and a generally higher regard for the merits of education in the community. In the early nineteenth century, the Coptic schools were better adapted to training for employment. The curriculum of these new schools, while mainly religious, also provided training to help them take up a trade or profession, often the one in which their father was engaged (e.g. secretary or land surveyor)[15]. This included practical geometry and arithmetic at an early stage. The Muslim schools of the same period concentrated on the Koran rather than on practical subjects. Although reform of the educational system was initiated by Muhammed Ali and continued throughout the century, the Copts retained their advantage. They made better use of the burgeoning European schools, and reformed their own schools under Patriarch Cyril (1853-61) and in the 1870s, in order to compete for posts in the government and the increasing number of commercial institutions[16]. In the same

period, Wakin suggests that the sons and grandsons of many of the landowners entered the professions, the implication being that their parents' wealth was an advantage to them[17]. Law was a favoured profession, as it offered a route into politics in which the Copts were very active from about this time until the decline of the Wafd party. Today, however, with less political scope and the abolition of the Coptic millet courts in 1955, fewer Copts choose this profession.

In the present century, the standard of education advanced little under the British, but there was a significant increase in the numbers in government schools between the two world wars[18]. Nevertheless, in 1931 there were still as many pupils in private schools as there were in government schools,[19] helping that part of the Coptic community which could afford fees to maintain its advantage. Under Nasser, however, educational institutions were nationalised, fees abolished and a common curriculum introduced[20]. The aim was to bring about social justice by increasing education across the board and reducing the advantages of the privileged middle class, in which the Copts were well represented. At the same time, the authorities attempted to replace influence by merit as the main criterion for advancement, and this benefited the Copts with their generally higher standard of education. However, steps were taken to check this and the recruitment of Copts into teaching positions in the university faculties was reduced[21]. Today, in the post-Nasser period, the growth of private tutoring to help pass vital examinations has again led to the favouring of the more affluent while the system remains nominally non-elitist[22].

The continuance of a Coptic advantage in education is demonstrated by the 1976 census statistics on educational level, as shown in Table 4.5. Despite the setbacks suffered by the Copts under Nasser's regime, they have maintained an educational advantage, due in part to an ability to pay for a better education, but also due to a greater motivation to acquire it. This is evidenced by the greater percentage of Copts completing primary and secondary education, where not only the middle-class elite are involved. However, the greatest discrepancies are in university education where, in proportion to their total numbers, over twice as many Copts complete degrees as Muslims.

Table 4.5: Muslim and Christian Educational Levels (percentage of population over six years old)

	Illiterate	Literate (no formal education)	Completed Primary education	Completed Secondary education	Completed University first degree	Completed post-graduate course	Unknown	Total
Muslim	57.1	20.6	7.8	10.8	1.8	0.08	1.8	100
Christian	44.3	20.1	9.7	19.0	4.8	0.18	1.9	100

Total Muslim population over six years old: 25,068,539

Total Christian population over six years old: 1,715,304

Source: 1976 census of all Egypt

It is the professions in particular that rely on this standard of education. While no well-documented figures are available, an indication of the importance of Copts in the professions can be seen in the daily newspapers. In the deaths columns of Al-Ahram on one day chosen at random (17 August 1984), memorials were contributed by two managers of taxation (for Fayoum and Cairo), an assistant manager of the National Bank of Egypt, an engineer in Kahro Mena, an engineering consultant, two university professors (one in medicine, the other in agriculture), a large pharmacy supplier, an optician and a dentist, all of whom (judging by their names) were Christian. Furthermore, Al-Ahram has probably the largest circulation in Egypt; the memorials are relatively expensive and prestigious and their sponsors are often at the top of their professions.

4.3.3 Occupations associated with religion

There is a broad group of occupations with religious connections in which the Copts have specialised (either in the past or today). Under some articles of Islamic law, Muslims are prevented from taking part in a particular activity and Copts (and also often Jews) are given a comparative advantage; in others, past Christian interest and specialisms have led to a tradition in one particular trade. In the Middle Ages, the Copts had a reputation for woodworking (at that time both a rural and an urban pursuit) and glass manufacture. The former is said to have its origins in a veneration for Joseph and Jesus as carpenters; the latter originated from Coptic expertise in stained glass.

Today, the occupations in which Copts have most advantage are those where there are prohibitions for Muslims. We have already seen how injunctions against usury in the Koran helped (and still help, but to a lesser extent) Coptic involvement in banking. Production of wine is another longstanding Coptic trade due to Muslim sanctions against the drinking of alcohol. However, the most vivid contemporary example of this response to prohibitions are the zabbaleen (rubbish collectors). They are mainly Copts, as one of the features of their trade is the raising of pigs (which Muslims will not eat). Originally villagers from Upper Egypt, they have migrated to Cairo over the

last fifty years. They live in squalid conditions among the rubbish they have collected, picking out any metal or other valuables and feeding the remainder to the pigs. The terrible conditions in which they live (a shanty town without water, sewerage, electricity or schools and with streets of trodden down rubbish) gives the lie to the idea that there are no Copts as poor as the poorest Muslims[23]. Rather, it supports a more general observation that the Copts will take advantage of any deficiency within the urban system (in this case the inability of the authorities to cope with the refuse generated).

4.3.4 Other occupations

In the Middle Ages, the Copts were well known for building, painting, weaving, dyeing, smithing (especially gold and silver) and jewellery manufacture[24]. Many of these were rural trades which were also important in the cities. Some were transferred from Upper Egypt to the city by migration (such as work in textiles), while others were products of the Coptic drive for advancement and security in a socially indispensable skill. Under the Ottomans, the guilds dealing with these trades tended either to include both Muslims and Copts (this was exceptional) or to have two guilds dealing with the same trade, one for each sect, maintaining segregation[25]. In the seventeenth century, the goldsmiths' guild was almost entirely Coptic, and in the nineteenth century there was a separate guild for 'Arab and Jewish' goldsmiths in Alexandria. Around 1870, in Cairo, there were separate guilds for local and Greek tailors with most of the local tailors being Copts[26]. Most of these occupations are no longer renowned for their large numbers of Christians, although it is possible that in some the Copts have a greater share than their natural proportion. The major exceptions to this are the precious metal/jewellery trades where there are still a very large number of Copts. This will be the subject of a case study in Chapter 5.

4.4. Summary

The urban occupations of the Copts are diverse, including jobs in all social strata and positions at all levels of

management. However, there are some occupations in which they make up a disproportionately large fraction of the workforce: most professions, financial and administrative positions, the gold and jewellery trades and rubbish-collecting. In most urban occupations they are over-represented, since 8.7 per cent of the urban population was Coptic in 1976 compared with 6.3 per cent of the national population.

There are few Copts in law, politics and large-scale entrepreneurial projects. The inclusion of the last case in this list is open to dispute. Ibrahim says that many large-scale Coptic ventures were lost in Nasser's nationalisation programme (e.g. many transport firms)[27], but Jomier states that it was Armenian and Syrian Christians and the Jews who provided capital for the large chain stores and factories[28] (e.g. the metal industry), and the Copts were rather small businessmen. It has been said that "the Copts form the backbone of the Egyptian middle class"[29] and, while they are represented in lower-status occupations, it is still in the relatively well-paid professions for the better-educated that the Copts are most over-represented.

The ability of the Copts to adapt to urban life and to use it to their advantage is borne out by this study of their occupations. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that a large minority of the Copts remain peasant farmers in Upper Egypt. In the present century there has been a substantial migration of all fellahin to the large cities, especially to Cairo. Since it is the primate city of Egypt, the governorate in which most Copts reside and the governorate with the greatest density of Copts, no study of the urbanicity of the Copts would be complete without a closer study of that city. The next chapter is therefore concerned solely with Cairo.

NOTES

1. Abu-Lughod, 1971, 176
2. Sjoberg, 1960, 262
3. Betts, 1975, 45, 52
4. Hammond & McCullagh, 1974, 201
5. See Appendix for the full working
6. Butler, 1978, 450
7. Staffa, 1977, 21

8. Butler, 1978, 450-51
9. Mikhail, 1911, 44
10. Baer, 1964, 97
11. Berger, 1957, 53, Table 13. The results shown in the table (reproduced here as Table 4.4) are not statistically significant
12. Ibrahim, 1982, 56
13. Ibrahim, 1982, 65
14. Pennington, 1982, 159
15. Heyworth-Dunne, 1936, 85, 87
16. Heyworth-Dunne, 1936, 282, 310, 410, 415, 420
17. Wakin, 1963, 28
18. Boktor, 1936, 135
19. Boktor, 1936, 135, 137
20. Atiya, 1968, 116
21. Pennington, 1982, 164
22. Waterbury, 1983, 239
23. Walker, 1984
24. Atiya, 1968, 88
25. Baer, 1964, 31
26. Baer, 1964, 30-31
27. Ibrahim, 1982, 65
28. Jomier, 1977, 76
29. M.M. Hanna, private interview

5 THE COPTS IN CAIRO

5.1. Introduction

Table 5.1 shows some features of the distribution of the Coptic community in Cairo. Once again there is no place in which the Copts are not represented. Each 'suburb' has at least 1,000 Christians. There are fourteen with over 10,000 and nine with over 20,000. These last nine are all in the northern part of the city, stretching in an arc from Shubra and Rod el Farag just north of the city centre, through Sahel, Hadieh el Koba, Sharabiya to the north-east and Zaytoun, Heliopolis, Matariya and Nozha further to the north-east (see Fig 4.2 for the suburban areas). However, the adjacent suburbs of Wailly and Medina Nasr have low Christian totals (under 10,000). The smaller city centre 'suburbs' have small total populations, but Christians are nevertheless numerous in Ezbekia and Zaher (over 18,000 each). However, elsewhere in the centre no suburb has over 8,000 Christians. In south Cairo there are fewer Christians still, although there is quite a strong representation in Old Cairo. The steel town of Helwan and the suburb of Toben south of Helwan (both in the governorate) are not really part of Cairo proper.

5.2. The Proportion of Christians in Cairo

5.2.1 Ezbekia, Shubra and surrounding suburbs

When the proportion of Christians in the total population is considered, a slightly different picture emerges (Fig 5.1). Ezbekia and Shubra stand out forcefully as, in both, over 30 per cent of the population are Christian, while no other suburb has over 21 per cent. These two are adjoining suburbs and adjacent to them are Rod el Farag (to the west), Sahel (to the north-west) and Zaher (to the east) with between seventeen per cent and 21 per cent. To the west of Ezbekia, Bulaq has a much smaller proportion (4.8 per cent), and Hadieh el Koba to the north-east has only 9.9 per cent. To the south of Ezbekia, in the city centre, there are also small percentages of Copts. Each suburb is divided into small enumeration districts, shiyakhas.

Shubra and Ezbekia have uniformly high percentages of

5.1 The Proportion of Christians in the Suburbs of Cairo

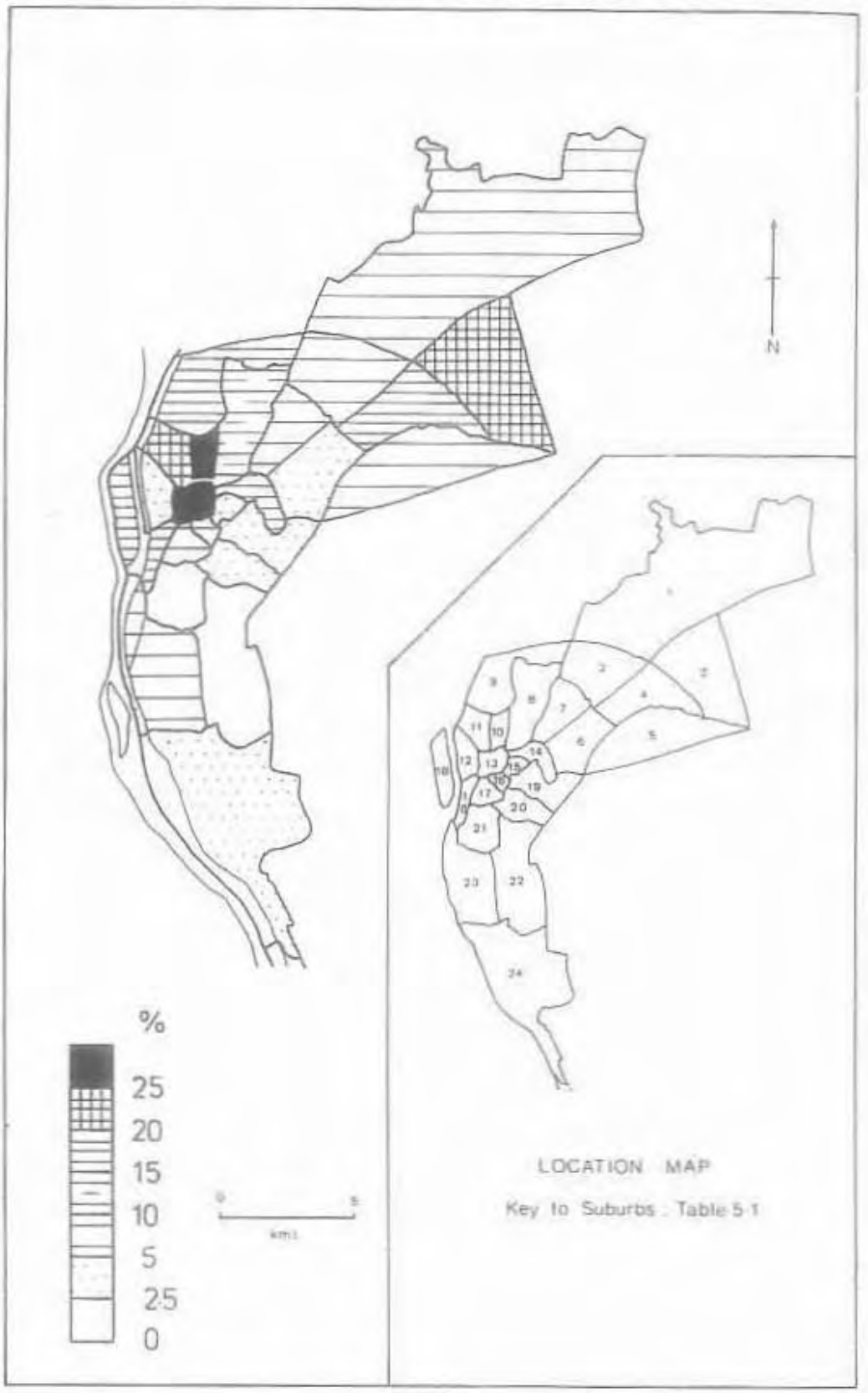


Table 5.1: Christians in Cairo

Suburb of Cairo	Number of Christians	Number of Muslims	Percentage Christians
1. Matariya	37,129	496,241	7.0
2. Nozha	20,524	81,303	20.1
3. Zaytoun	24,238	243,083	9.1
4. Heliopolis	24,948	102,181	19.6
5. Medina Nasr	4,302	60,545	6.6
6. Wailly	6,212	135,608	4.4
7. Hadieh el Koba	31,053	283,286	9.9
8. Sharabiya	53,108	389,972	12.0
9. Sahel	75,477	362,684	17.2
10. Shubra	49,926	78,982	38.7
11. Rod el Farag	56,992	215,088	20.9
12. Bulaq	8,589	168,866	4.8
13. Ezbekia	18,420	40,988	31.0
14. Zaher	19,125	85,201	18.3
15. Bab el Shariya	5,454	104,815	4.9
16. Muski	3,807	54,341	6.5
17. Abdin	6,721	80,975	7.7
18. Kasr el Nil	7,011	31,052	18.3
19. Gamaliya	6,118	160,638	3.7
20. El Darb el Ahmer	3,921	142,475	2.7
21. Saiyida Zeinab	4,947	247,119	2.0
22. Khalifa	1,258	185,093	0.7
23. Old Cairo	14,721	255,580	5.4
24. Maadi	11,665	254,883	4.4
25. Helwan*	18.017	264,588	6.4
26. Toben*	828	32,028	2.5
Total	516,401	4,557,615	10.2

* not in Fig 5.1

Source: 1976 Census, Cairo governorate

Christians: the four Shiyakhas of Shubra vary from 55 per cent to 29 per cent while the eight shiyakhas of Ezbekia vary from 46 per cent to fifteen per cent. All of these are above the average for Cairo (ten per cent). The surrounding suburbs described above show much greater variation: Rod el Farag has one shiyakha with 51 per cent, but two of the remaining five are under ten per cent. Sahel has two out of eight shiyakhas over 20 per cent, but two under ten per cent while Zaher has one shiyakha with over 30 per cent, but three of the remaining five under ten per cent. Those shiyakhas with high Christian proportions in these suburbs are generally located close to the heartland of Ezbekia and Shubra; those with lower percentages further away.

The reasons for the high proportion of Christians in Shubra, Ezbekia and some surrounding shiyakhas are initially historical. To quote Abu Lughod:[1]

> Underlying not only the older sections but the entire city of Cairo are principles of organisation derived from the mediaeval progenitor... (including) the basic framework of its social and ecological organisation - diverse ethnic, religious and class divisions which subdivide the modern city in much the same way they had fragmented the mediaeval one.

The largest Coptic quarter in Ottoman times was just north of Ezbekia pond, in the district where St Mark's Coptic Orthodox Cathedral stands today[2]. (Under the Ottomans, Old Cairo continued its slow decline in importance and thus it was no longer the most important Christian centre by the nineteenth century). Ezbekia pond was filled in and Ezbekia gardens and the surrounding buildings built by 1868. This was a high-prestige area which attracted many Europeans and, as such, was similar in character to Kasr el Nil, which will be discussed later. The present administrative suburb of Ezbekia has six of its shiyakhas to the north of the Ezbekia gardens and here the Copts' quarter continued, if anything strengthened by the influx of wealthier Copts to the south. In 1907, 20,000 Egyptian Copts lived in this quarter, with only 7,000 in the yet-to-be-developed northern areas. By 1927, however, those Copts in the centre had risen to 32,000 but those to the north now numbered 40,000[3]. Shubra was

thus the logical geographical extension of Ezbekia and has been a favourite residential area for Copts for seventy years. The uneasy balance between poor rural farmers (almost totally Muslim) and the middle-class Copts was broken by the influx of rural migrants, poor and middle-class, most of whom were Muslims[4]. The watershed appears to have been around 1927, after which the Copts began to be displaced. Sahel became an area into which low income workers crowded, and Wailly a mixed zone of migrants. Even in Shubra, Muslims were interspersed with Copts[5]. Abu-Lughod believes that the influx of migrants, especially from the Delta, to the northern sector of Cairo during the Second World War was due to the location of the Khazindar bus terminal in Shubra. This was the main point of entry for workers coming into Cairo from the north in the boom years of the war[6].
Nevertheless, Shubra remained the Coptic centre as most migrants moved to unbuilt areas further north. In 1960 the middle-class character of Shubra remained[7]. It was originally a place in which Coptic clerks and administrators lived while working in the port of Bulaq, and these occupations have not altered (unlike their location), despite some wealthier Copts moving to outlying settlements such as Heliopolis. Shubra and northern Ezbekia remain the centre of Coptic Cairo, a place for Coptic migrants today to gravitate towards and find community support.

5.2.2 The new suburbs reclaimed from the desert

The outlying centres of Heliopolis and Nasr city are middle-class growth areas in the desert to the north and east of Cairo. Heliopolis, and its continuation into Nozha, is the final area in Cairo with a high percentage of Copts; each suburb having about 20 per cent - Zaytoun, nearer the city centre and Nasr city both have lower percentages of Christians (under ten per cent).

Heliopolis was of foreign origin and grew rapidly after it was connected by tram to central Cairo in 1908. It attracted, however, not the northern Europeans but the middle-class of Egypt who were disproportionately either Coptic or Mediterranean European[8]. Some Copts moved out of Shubra and Ezbekia; other middle class migrants moved there direct. The establishment of churches helped to form a focus for the Coptic communities. Later migrants in the post-war period included a great proportion

of Muslims, who settled around the more established residents. Hence the Copts are more concentrated in the central areas of the city. The new city of Medina Nasr has many fewer Copts as it reflects the rising middle class in which the Muslim Egyptians are much better represented.

5.23 Central Cairo

Among the central suburbs (apart from Ezbekia), only Kasr el Nil has a Christian population of more than ten per cent. The remainder (Abdin, Bab el Shariya, Muski, Gamaliya and El Darb el Ahmer) make up all of the walled city, and reflect the degree of segregation in mediaeval Cairo. The old Frankish and Jewish quarters in Muski have totally disappeared during the twentieth century, and the separate Muslim communities coalesced to dominate the residential areas. The one important exception with mediaeval origins is El Sagha in the Khan el Khalili where there is a majority of Copts. This area of the goldsmiths will be studied in greater detail at the end of this chapter.

Kasr el Nil has a different heritage. It is the area most recently reclaimed from the Nile and began to be developed at the end of the nineteenth century. The location of the British Consulate General made the area attractive for high-ranking foreigners. Garden City, Zamalik, south Ezbekia and Kasr el Nil itself remain bastions of privilege, despite many foreigners having left after the revolution. Today the high Christian percentage in the census is still influenced by the presence of foreigners, especially the embassy staffs (most embassies are in this suburb) and all the functions associated with the foreign community. In addition, this is the least populous suburb in Cairo, so that only 7,000 Christians make up a large percentage.

.5.24 South Cairo

To the south of the city centre there is a low proportion of Copts. Sayida Zeinab, Khalifa, Old Cairo and Maadi all have less than ten per cent Copts, and Khalifa is the lowest in Cairo with under one per cent. This is largely due to historical reasons. The burning of Fustat (1168 AD) removed many Copts from the area, left what is still largely wasteland, and confined their religious minorities (the Jews and Copts) within the walled city

of Old Cairo. The Jews had mostly left by 1956, but there remains a Coptic concentration within the walls which is one of the least assimilated in Cairo[9]. As these southern suburbs have grown in population, they have retained their character as lower-class areas and have attracted few Copts. Middle-class Christians have moved to Heliopolis while the working-class migrants have sought Christian communities or relatives, where there are larger proportions of Copts.

5.3. Summary

In contrast to the situation in the mediaeval period, there is now no Coptic quarter where the population is almost solely Coptic, nor is there a suburb area (saving Khalifa) where there are virtually no Copts. Nevertheless, even if the extremes are not present, assimilation is not so complete that there are no Coptic strongholds. The pattern was initiated by the mediaeval city (so that Ezbekia effectively spawned Shubra), or by foreign involvement (as in Kasr el Nil) or by a combination of the two (as in Heliopolis). Despite the huge rural-urban migration of the twentieth century, this pattern has endured. Large numbers of Muslims have moved into all these areas, yet the community structure of the Copts focused on the church has proved resilient. Many migrants automatically contact acquaintances or relatives from their village, which, if it was a largely Coptic village in Upper Egypt, inevitably reinforces a degree of segregation. This process has helped to counteract the effects of the recent disproportionate number of Muslim migrants to Cairo, and the Coptic strongholds in Cairo are still easily identified. It will be interesting to see if the building of the new Cathedral at Abbasiya, not an area with a disproportionately large number of Copts, will lead to the establishment of a new, well-defined Coptic area.

5.4. A Case Study: El Sagha

Unique in Cairo today as regards the Coptic community is the position of El Sagha, the non-residential, gold-trading street which abuts the principal tourist souk, the Kan el Khalili. In

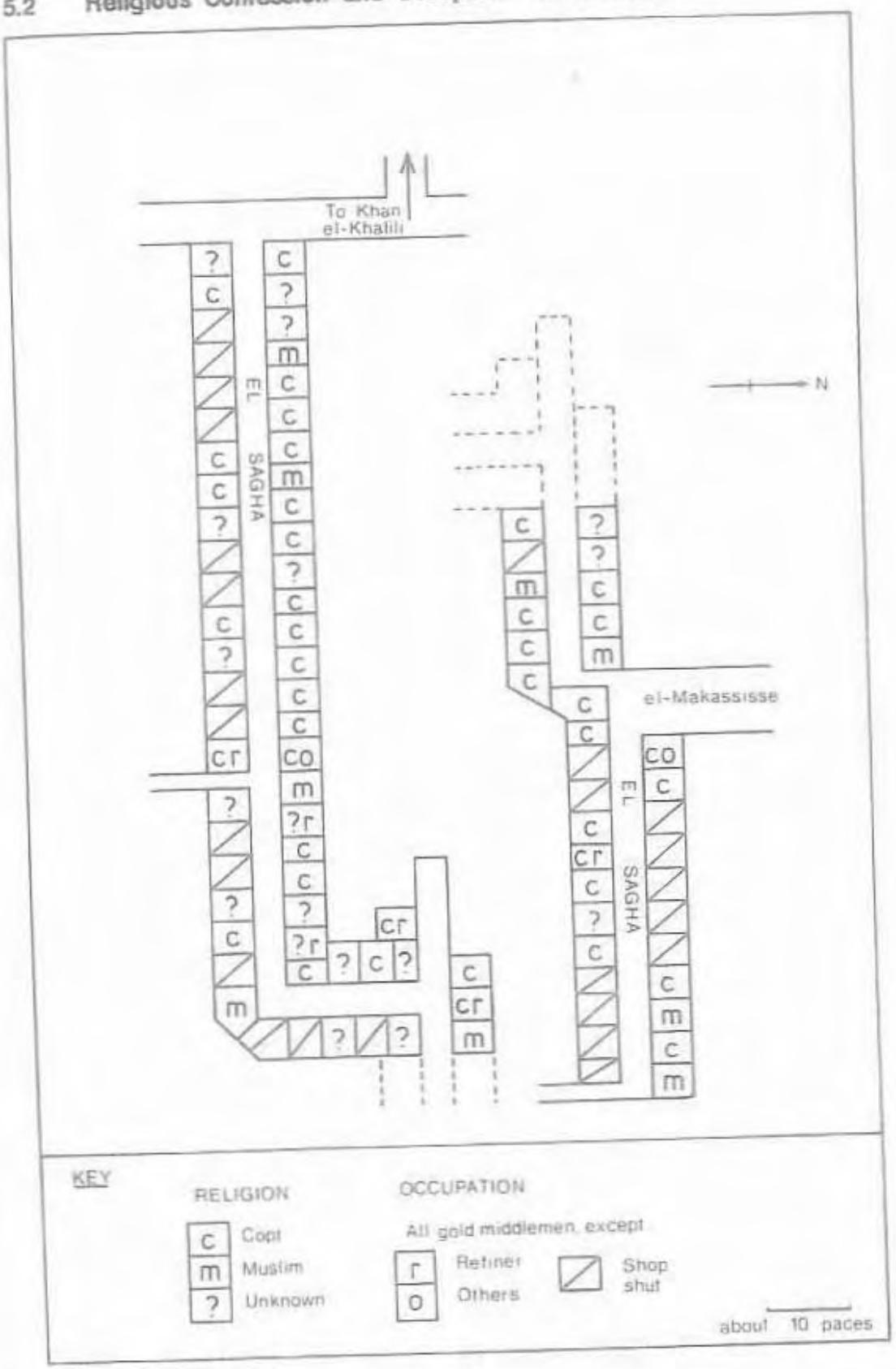
an adjacent shiyakha, Been el Sourayn, 54 per cent of the population are Copts. This matches the highest proportions in Shubra and Ezbekia, yet is an isolated concentration of Copts. Gamaliya, the suburb in which El Sagha occurs, has only 3.7 per cent Copts, a percentage that would be reduced to 1.8 if Been el Sourayn was not included. The link between this area and El Sagha was not investigated in the fieldwork described below, but comment from traders in El Sagha indicated that some of the Copts living nearby were related to the gold-traders and involved in their business.

El Sagha is in fact an historical anachronism, which demonstrates today the segregation of minorities in the mediaeval cities of Egypt. The Khan el Khalili itself was founded in AD 1400 to the north of El Azhar mosque. El Sagha, the street of the goldsmiths, runs to the west of the Khan el Khalili, with its eastern end today close to the jewellers' part of the Khan el Khalili. Although today the Copts are only a small minority in Gamaliya, in mediaeval times other 'people of the book' clustered inside the walls of Cairo, attracted by the opportunity for profit in supplying the principal Islamic centre in Egypt, El Azhar mosque. Around AD 1800, the Venetian centre was adjacent to El Sagha, the Greek quarter six hundred metres to the south and the Jewish quarter (Harat el Yahudi) no more than one hundred metres to the west[10]. The Jewish and Greek quarters remained until the revolution of 1952 and the exodus of Jews and foreign capital that took place in the succeeding years.

El Sagha is a single street with only 94 shops, but with an obvious concentration of economic functions and, to a seeking eye, an equally obvious concentration of Christians. The street also has only one major sidestreet along its length. It thus provided a unique and self-contained area in which to carry out a case study.

Figure 5.2 is the result of fieldwork carried out in Cairo in January 1984. Two visits were made to the street on different days, in early afternoon and early evening (the street closed at eight o'clock). The type of shop and the religion of the owner were both recorded if possible. No attempt was made to record the exact width of each shop or the width of the street, although it may be noted that there was little variation between shop

5.2 Religious Confession and Occupation in El Sagha



widths (four to six paces) and the street itself was uniformly narrow, about six paces in width. Figure 5.2 is a diagrammatic representation showing the general direction and turnings in the street; in reality it was not straight along an east-west axis, nor was the one 'dog-leg' precisely at right angles. The relationship of the shops to each other is, however, accurately represented.

The economic function of each shop was ascertained by observation. Unfortunately, this was not possible for 26 of the shops as they were closed on both visits with (as is traditional in the street) locked shutters pulled over the whole of the shop face. Two or three clearly had rebuilding going on, but the others may have been shut as it was the off-peak period for gold trading. (The busiest period is during the summer, when gold remittances flow in from Egyptians on holiday after earning money in the oil states). Apart from this, the different functions of the shops were easily assessed. Only three were not concerned with gold. There was one food shop (on the corner of el Makassisse, where there were other small stores and cafes) and one clothing shop. The third was dealing in brass, a function closely enough related to the gold dealers to be included among them. Of the remainder, six were gold refiners working over open hearths with molten gold, and the rest were acting as middlemen in gold. This most numerous category could be identified by the large safes in their shops and prominent pairs of scales. Some also sold simple adornments (gold rings, necklaces and earrings) but not the most sophisticated jewellery manufactured and sold in the Khan el Khalili. These men were selling the gold refined in the street, or sold to them by individuals, either direct to a consumer or to the little jewellery 'factories' found above the shops in the Khan el Khalili. There is thus a direct functional link between El Sagha and the tourist-oriented trade in the Khan el Khalili.

Identification of the creed of the shop-owners was more of a problem. It is impossible to ask each shopkeeper in turn his religion in such a tight-knit community without first being trusted by them, an operation that would have taken many weeks. However, many display their creed openly and it was therefore possible positively to identify the religion of the owners of

most of the shops. The display was is in the form of pictures or writings. The Copts portrayed George and the Dragon, the Virgin and Child or, less commonly, a picture of Pope Shenouda. The Muslims appeared less demonstrative, usually restricting themselves to one sura from the Koran. Where both occurred (as happened on two occasions) no positive identification was made, although it is likely these shops were owned by Muslims (as many Muslims in Egypt have a high regard for both St. George and the Virgin Mary). One possible criticism is that a Muslim, in a Coptic-dominated environment, may put up a picture of the Virgin and no sura from the Koran to keep at peace with his neighbours, and thus render the method of identification inaccurate. It is unlikely, however, that this happened in more than one or two (if any) cases. Firstly, there were few with both signs up (also a sign of appeasement); secondly, only the street is Coptic, not most of the surrounding area. Furthermore, the religious symbol is more than just a sign of allegiance; it is also a talisman. It is therefore unlikely that a superstitious Muslim would expose himself to a Coptic symbol without also having an Islamic symbol visible.

As a result, there were only eighteen shops that remained unidentified (with no symbol apparent of an ambiguity of symbols). The vast majority positively identified were Copts.

Table 5.2 Shops in El Sagha

Economic function		Religious identity	
Gold traders	60	Coptic shops	41
Gold refiners	6	Muslim shops	9
Other functions	2	Unidentified	18
Shops shut	26	Shops shut	26
Total	94	Total	94

This economic and religious clustering has continued in El Sagha for hundreds of years. Its perpetuation was largely a result of the mediaeval and Ottoman guilds.

> (The) guilds drew much of their strength from the fact that they were composed of individuals who knew one another, even as the shaykh's control was only effective because he knew each one individually. Most of the guilds were confined to a single quarter, and if the occupation was common, practised in all parts of the city, usually there were a number of corporations relating to separate quarters. The special status of the practitioners too was important, for ties of religion and ethnicity did much to intensify social bonds. With few exceptions, members of a guild shared ties of religion or ethnicity[11]

El Sagha is an excellent example of this situation. It has remained over the last hundred years (since the guilds faded), because the Copts had nowhere to flee to and the Muslims could not easily learn the expertise or gain the capital to start businesses. Those who already had both these necessities (and there have always been Muslim gold-workers) would have found openings in the already crowded main street few and far between. Indeed, the scattered positions of Muslims in El Sagha today probably represent a process of infilling as shops have gradually come up for sale. The economic nature of the street has remained unaltered because of the continuation of an outlet in the Khan el Khalili. Possession of gold jewellery has always been highly prized by the Egyptians, but it was possible that demand could have dropped with the departure of foreign capital after the revolution to an extent that other functions could have infiltrated El Sagha. This has not been the case, as remittances (often in gold) from abroad have kept a flow of wealth through El Sagha, while the Khan el Khalili has become established as the principal tourist souk. The standard of goods here has not diminished and profits are still high.

One question remains to be considered: how did the Copts achieve this influence in gold-dealing, not only in Cairo but in all Egypt? There are a number of possible solutions. First, it is an urban occupation, and, as we have seen, for various reasons the Copts are attracted to urban areas. Secondly, the Copts had a tradition of gold-working, necessary for the ornaments in churches, which continued after the Arab invasion. Thirdly, as

the land-tax was periodically made more effective, Copts may have been tempted to move their capital into highly lucrative gold-working. Fourthly, gold was closely connected with financial activities in which the Copts were already engaged. Finally, this was a traditional occupation for minorities in the Middle East, most commonly carried out by the Jews. In times of oppression, the skill of an individual could not be taken away, even if his wealth was, and thus recovery was possible. Furthermore, gold, unlike property, was easily hidden or transported. Again, in times of oppression, especially if it was by the mob and of short duration, some wealth could be preserved if it was in gold.

El Sagha is a location which deserves further research. The study described above despite limitations of time, describes a unique street in Cairo and helps to explain how the Copts have survived and even thrived in urban Egypt.

NOTES

1. Abu-Lughod, 1971, 56. Much of the analysis for this chapter has only been possible because of the existence of this work, which is still the best modern sociological study of all Cairo, even though much of it is based on the 1960 census
2. Staffa, 1977, 270, 384
3. Abu-Lughod, 1971, 176. The figures quoted are based on Clerget's estimates
4. Abu-Lughod, 1971, 177
5. Ibid
6. Abu-Lughod, 1961, 22-32
7. Abu-Lughod, 1971, 212
8. Abu-Lughod, 1971, 217
9. Abu-Lughod, 1971, 201
10. Staffa, 1977, map facing p. 230
11. Staffa, 1977, 332

6 CONCLUSION: THE SECTARIAN CONFLICT UNDER SADAT (1972-81) AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

6.1 Introduction

The presidency of Anwar Sadat and the manner of his demise focused attention on the Coptic community in Egypt today and revealed the dangers of mismanagement of the religious division in Egypt; on the other hand, stability since Sadat's death has revealed the genuine national unity between the vast majority of Muslims and Christians in Egypt. As a conclusion, therefore, this chapter will attempt to portray the contemporary Coptic community as part of the Egyptian nation in the light of the most important sectarian crisis in Egypt since the 1911 Coptic congress met in Assyout.

6.2 Past Coptic Involvement in Politics

Traditionally the Copts have been only a marginal influence in Egyptian politics and have had little representation in the political structure. As soon as the large Muslim majority was established, the Copts became no more than a pressure group with particular interests. The only body capable of acting for Coptic interests in particular was the Coptic Orthodox Church, and this was formally acknowledged in the political system, when the Ottoman Empire established millets for the different religious groups. In the wider issues of political concern before this century (e.g. maintenance of the irrigation system, general taxation, commerce, foreign policy) the Copts shared the same concerns as other Egyptians and were divided not on sectarian grounds, but along the other cleavages in Egyptian society (i.e. class, occupation, urban/rural differentiation, etc.). The only difference was that the decision-makers were Muslims (although often the rulers themselves were not of Egyptian origin, such as Salah al-Din and Muhammed Ali).

In the last hundred years, individual Copts have been able to pursue a much more active involvement in the political life of the country, and it is worth mentioning briefly some of the main figures and the events in which they were involved. The British

occupation of 1882 led to a movement of national unity between Muslims and Copts in support of Ahmad Urabi's revolt,[1] led on the Christian side by the Patriarch himself. After the failure of this revolt, the British used 'divide and rule' tactics and sponsored some Copts in government. The most famous example is Boutros Pasha Ghali who was successively Minister of Finance, Foreign Minister and Prime Minister before being assassinated in 1910 by a Muslim nationalist[2]. The nationalist revolution of 1919 saw an alliance between Copts and Muslims against the British. When Yussef Wehba, a Copt, became Prime Minister in 1919, he was assassinated by a fellow Copt because he had broken the nationalists' boycott of the British. The nationalist movement was led by Zaghlul who deliberately sought the support of the Copts, so that there would be less possibility of the British returning to 'divide and rule' tactics. The nationalists later became the Wafd party, still under the leadership of Zaghlul. After independence, several Copts were on the committee drafting the 1923 Constitution, which guaranteed religious freedom and equality before the law and in the civil service. Two prominent members of the Wafd party were Wassef Boutros Ghali and Makram Obeid Pasha, who became cabinet ministers in 1926, and thereafter Copts participated in the cabinet of every government until the revolution. Following the 1952 revolution, the Copts were effectively excluded from the government as there were none on the Revolutionary Command Council. The People's Assembly (parliament) elected in 1957 contained no Copts and in the new Assembly of 1958 again none were elected. On this occasion, however, Nasser appointed ten Copts to the Assembly and later chose one for the Cabinet, setting a precedent which has continued[3]. At the end of Nasser's regime, sectarianism began to re-emerge after having lain dormant under the monarchy. The only incident of any note under Nasser was the attempt by the bishops to change the new personal status law of 1955 so as to discourage conversions to Islam for the purpose of divorce[4].

6.3 Sectarian Conflict under Sadat

President Sadat adopted a different political trend after his accession to power in October 1970 by introducing a new

Constitution a year later. This re-established Islam as the state religion and restrictions on the Muslim brotherhood were gradually lifted[5]. These concessions to the fundamentalists were intended to counter-balance the hostile influence of the left in the form of Nasserists, Marxists and radical students[6], of whom the latter were very active in 1972-3. As a result, Muslim outcry over converts to Christianity in Alexandria in 1972 was great, and forged documents relating to a patriarchal plot to bring the Copts to power were distributed. Responding to fears over the consequences of these actions, an Assembly of Christian Churches in Egypt met in Alexandria in July 1972 and made the following demands:[7]

(i) A ban on publications attacking the Christian faith.
(ii) An end to discrimination in the universities.
(iii) An end to the 'sectarian and mischievous' policies of the Ministry of Awqaf.
(iv) An end to the restriction on building churches.
(v) An end to discrimination in high government posts.
(vi) No dilution of laws of personal status among non-Muslims.

Sadat refused these demands and the People's Assembly enacted a law on 15 August prescribing life imprisonment for anyone attempting to stir up sectarian strife and undermining national unity. Intercommunal tension increased (there were at least ten sectarian incidents after 11 August according to a government report issued later) and the following events occurred in the Autumn:[8]

- September 29: Copts were stoned and a new church fired in Damanhow
- November 6 : An unauthorised church at Khanka (near Cairo) was burned down
- November 12 : A protest procession to the church by over 100 priests took place, and Mass was held in the ruins of the church. A counter-march by Muslims was held later in the evening which resulted in arson attacks on some Coptic shops.

Following these outbreaks of violence, a parliamentary commission was set up which recommended relaxing the law regarding the construction of churches, prohibiting proselytism

inside Egypt by either sect, censoring religious books and finally recommending an urgent meeting of the Maglis el Milli which had not met since 1961[9]. Sadat did in fact offer the concession of 50 new churches each year shortly afterwards[10].

No further serious sectarian disturbances were reported until 1978, but, in the meantime, radical Islamic groups were emerging, bitterly critical of the peace with Israel and soon to be inspired by the Iranian revolution[11]. In 1977 Sadat attempted to maintain the appearance of being the primary Islamic force in the country by ordering the preparation of draft laws based on the Sharia, an issue guaranteed to provoke fear in the Coptic community. Tension had already been growing following Pope Shenouda's audience with President Carter in 1977, the agitation by North American expatriate Copts, and the increasingly vocal Islamic group. Sadat met with Pope Shenouda and the Sheikh of el Azhar in September 1977 in the interests of national unity, but this did not prevent outbreaks of violence when some family laws were changed in the Appeals Court in March 1978, legitimizing polygamy for Christians. The following are some of the more important events between 1978 and 1981[12]:

- April 24, 1978	(Good Friday) : Two chapels in Menoufia attacked by Muslims.
- April 25, 1978	Fighting in Minya between Copts and Muslims after a Christian place of worship had been sacked.
- May 14, 1978	Student unrest in Assyout after Muslim students overran a dormitory.
- September 28, 1978	Coptic priest murdered in Minya province after attempting to reconvert a Coptic convert to Islam.
- Throughout 1979	Disturbances in Upper Egypt (there are few details owing to press censorship of information) and the oldest church in Old Cairo burned down.
- January 5, 1980	Clashes between students of the two sects at Cairo University.
- January 6, 1980	(Coptic Christmas Eve) : Two bomb attacks on churches in Alexandria.

- January 14-18, 1980	Various government measures to limit Muslim fundamentalist activities, which only strengthened ill-feeling among the Muslims and failed to appease the Copts.
- March 26, 1980	Speech by Pope Shenouda attacking the idea of Sharia law as the basis for legislation and withdrawing special Good Friday services.
- April 15, 1980	Sectarian disturbances in Minya (two killed, 35 injured) after a personal quarrel between a Copt and a Muslim degenerated into a street battle.
- early May, 1980	Coptic emigrees embarrass Sadat on a visit to Washington by demonstrating on the street.
- May 15, 1980	Sadat submits a constitutional amendment to make the Sharia the sole (rather than principal) source for legislation, which was approved by 98.8 per cent of voters, and attacks the Coptic leadership publicly. Pope Shenouda withdraws to a monastery to allow things to calm down.
- May 23, 1981	Disturbances in Alexandria.
- June 18-19, 1981	Two days of fighting over the construction of a church in north-east Cairo. Fourteen dead, 50 wounded and 166 arrested.
- August 4, 1981	Bomb attack at a Coptic wedding in Shubra; five dead and 57 wounded. Numerous other incidents between June and September.
- September 3-5, 1981	The arrest of 1,536 journalists, politicians, Muslim Brothers and Copts, including eight bishops and the dismissal of Pope Shenouda.
- October 6, 1981	Assassination of President Sadat by Muslim fundamentalists.

It is clear that the reason for Sadat's failure was his

inability to deal with the Muslim fundamentalist challenge to his policies, and this challenge to his authority spilled over into sectarian violence. Yet the contrast between the events of Sadat's regime and those of Nasser and (as yet) those of Mubarak poses a deeper question. Was this violence solely due to Sadat's inability to cope with the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, or has the Coptic community also become more militant? Once this question has been tackled, it will be appropriate to consider briefly the future of the Coptic minority in a country which, with only a few exceptions, still abhors sectarian violence.

6.4 Possible Underlying Reasons for Sectarian Conflict

The timing of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Egypt was not coincidental. The forces of the right-wing religious militants had been crushed by Nasser in 1954 and suppressed throughout his regime[13]. Nasser created a strongly secularized ideology, which attempted to integrate the state through scientific planning and political and socialist organisation. He also attempted to promote Arab nationalism through Islamic Arab history which led to an Islamic renewal opposed to the use of Islam in politics. However, by the beginning of Sadat's rule it was clear that efforts at national integration through Nasserism had failed. Martin[14] suggests a number of possible underlying reasons for this. First, the new managerial class in power eliminated the Nasserite left, both in the party (May 1971) and among the intelligentsia (February 1973). This left it without a socio-economic vision with which to gain a national consensus, and an ideological vacuum was created into which Islamic fundamentalism could move. Equally, there was no denying the growing economic and demographic problems in Egypt in the 1970s. The migrations to the city and the unemployment which resulted were social problems that could be alleviated by falling back into the traditional religious fraternity. This was true for both Copt and Muslim, and helped to create a situation in which sectarian tension could fester. To Egypt and the outside world the dramatic policies of Sadat (the expulsion of the Russians, the 1973 war with Israel, the Open Door policy, the Camp David agreement) masked the true situation, but none of these policies

restrained the long-term movement towards fundamentalism. Indeed, Sadat's need to counterbalance the left in the early days of his regime led him to encourage the extremists, while his peace policy with Israel infuriated them. The resurgence of fundamentalism in the Muslim world as a whole was also a powerful stimulant.

It is possible to trace similar factors in the Coptic renewal that has taken place alongside the Islamic renewal. Originally this was a lay revival which took place in the nineteenth century. It arose out of a small group inspired by the reforms under Kirollos IV and was embodied in the Maglis el Milli founded in 1874. It was supported by the emergence of the great families, many of whom were educated in missionary schools, and it had responsibility for the financial and legal affairs of the community. The laity were anti-clerical and fought an almost continual battle with Kirollos V[15]. The renewal paralleled the contemporary Islamic resurgence inspired by Afghani, Abduh and Ali Yusuf[16]. The tension between the two communities came to a height in 1911, when the Coptic lay congress in Assyout was opposed by a Muslim counter-congress in Heliopolis. However, these two movements were overtaken by the secular nationalist movements after the First World War, as described earlier.

The decline of the Wafd and the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood re-awakened fears of the Copts. It is significant that, at this time, the first criticisms by the Copts of the official population statistics were heard and both groups accused each other of benefiting from the British occupation.

The second phase of the renewal was not lay, but among the clergy. This was partly due to Nasser's abolition of the Maglis el Milli (as it was a power-base for the great Coptic families), which restored the Patriarch as an absolute monarch[17]. At the same time the increase in the number of students going to schools and universities helped to create a new Coptic middle class, but most important of all was the Sunday School movement. This not only increased Christian religious intruction but also meant that the catechists responsible for the movement personified the new Coptic identity[18]. The Sunday School movement grew from the Protestant missionary influence of non-liturgical worship, but has since been embraced by the Orthodox Church to the extent that

Pope Shenouda is a former Sunday School teacher.

Relying on this background, Martin suggests several hypotheses regarding this renewal. First, the new influential priests and monks began to exercise their influence through the Sunday School movement. Secondly, whereas the older lay teachers were concerned with the integration of the community through liberal democratic (and secular?) means, the new group awarenesss is centred on the church. Thirdly, there is a parallel between the return to the Arab-Muslim heritage and the return of the Christian to his Coptic-monastic heritage. One was encouraged by Western orientalism, the other by Western patristic studies. Finally, the spiritual development of the Coptic community has highlighted their differences from the Muslims and led to greater exclusivity[19].

6.5 Conclusion

These hypotheses are not proven but, if it is true that there is a greater group awareness among Copts which has developed in parallel with Muslim militancy, the implications are grave for the future of sectarian relations in Egypt. Any further attempts to impose Islamic law on the country are likely to be firmly opposed by Pope Shenouda. Indeed, his activist and charismatic leadership in the Sadat years was in in marked contrast with the less confrontational diplomacy of Pope Kirollos VI with Nasser. However, the opening years of Mubarak's presidency have proved to be very quiet. The removal of the figure forever associated with peace with Israel, combined with the clamp-down on Islamic militancy have, at least for the time being, drawn the sting of the various Muslim extremist groups. Pope Shenouda remained silent while exiled in Wadi Natrun and was released in January 1985. Mubarak has cautiously introduced limited democracy (effectively only allowing the revived Wafd as an opposition party in the Assembly in the elections of May 1984), but it is too early to see what effect this will have. Egypt is genuinely moderate in religious matters and has seen less sectarian violence than many surrounding Arab countries. This traditionally moderate attitude, coupled with the undeniable national pride of Copt and Muslim alike, continues to form a

powerful resistance to the underlying process of sectarian division suggested by Martin. It remains to be seen whether the spiritual renewal of both Muslims and Copts will continue and, if it does, whether these forces can be chanelled into more fruitful occupations than confrontation.

NOTES

1. Samaan & Sukkary, 1978, 136
2. Vatikiotis, 1976, 196-97
3. Fiches du Monde Arabe, 1-E76
4. Pennington, 1982, 164
5. Fiches du Monde Arabe, 1-E75, 1-E76
6. Waterbury, 1983, 359
7. The full text of the telegram is printed in Masriya, 1976
8. Further references to these events can be found in Fiches du Monde Arabe, 1-E167 and O'Kane, 1976
9. Fiches du Monde Arabe, 1-E76
10. Heikal, 1983, 184
11. Waterbury, 1983, 362
12. These events were reconstructed from Fiches du Monde Arabe, 1-E167, 1-E168; Heikal, 1983, 219; Waterbury, 1983 361; Pennington, 1982, 174-75
13. Vatikiotis, 1976, 389, 405
14. Martin, 1976, 31-54
15. Atiya, 1968, 108ff
16. Vatikiotis, 1976, Ch.9
17. Pennington, 1982, 165
18. Martin, 1976, 33
19. Martin, 1976, 33-34

Appendix

A = % of Xtns in total pop^{n} of government (Table 4.1)

B = % of Xtns when in each " "

C = % of Muslims " " "

$$\tau = \frac{S}{\frac{1}{2}N(N-1)}$$

Where S is the sum contributed by the ranks of one variable (see Hammond and McCullogh p.201) and N is the number of paired ranks.

As N>10 probability has been established by calculating a z-value from

$$z = \tau \sqrt{\frac{2(2N+5)}{9N(N-1)}}$$

For the partial correlation

$$\tau_{ABC} = \frac{\tau_{AB}-(\tau_{AC} \times \tau_{BC})}{\sqrt{(1-\tau_{AC}^2)(1-\tau_{BC}^2)}}$$

1) For N = 19 (i.e. when only the 6 urban governorates are excluded)

$\tau_{AB(Ho1)} = \frac{-67}{171} = \underline{-0.392}$ $\quad z = \frac{0.392}{0.167} = \underline{-2.344}$

$\tau_{BC(Ho2)} = \frac{99}{171} = \underline{0.579}$ $\quad z = \frac{0.579}{0.167} = \underline{3.463}$

$$\tau_{ABC} = \frac{-0.392 - (-0.099 \times 0.579)}{\sqrt{(1-0.990)(1-0.665)}} = \underline{0.413}$$

2) For N = 13 (i.e. excluding all governorates over 35% urban)

$\tau_{AB(Ho1)} = \frac{-41}{78} = \underline{-0.526}$ $\quad z = \frac{0.526}{0.210} = \underline{-2.503}$

$\tau_{BC(Ho2)} = \frac{32}{78} = \underline{0.410}$ $\quad z = \frac{0.410}{0.210} = \underline{1.951}$

$$\tau_{ABc} = \frac{-0.526 - (-0.115 \times 0.410)}{\sqrt{(1-0.013)(1-0.168)}} = -0.529$$

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